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SOCIETY IN A GARRISON TOWN.

A NOVEL.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

“MYSELF AND MY RELATIVES,” &c.

“Tyranny is a great evil, and to give despotic power to any individual, is to encourage such an evil.”

VOL. III.

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SOCIETY IN A GARRISON TOWN.

CHAPTER I.

THE CLOUD OVER EVERGREEN.

AND so it was understood in the household at Evergreen, that Dora Bouverie was engaged to Mr. Clarke, the barrack-master ; and from the household the intelligence was spread abroad through the town of Norham, to the surprise of many, and the delight of some, who had feared that the young lady might have made a better match, and married a man of far higher rank and influence, and probably of more distinguished appearance, than Allan Clarke. Nobody spoke with malignity of the affair, except, perhaps, some

of Dora's slighted admirers, who talked of Clarke being twice her age, and said that she could not possibly care for him—that he was a fool to think of a young wife like her, &c. And then rumours went about that the Bouveries were in very bad circumstances, expecting a mighty crash ; for do not such rumours somehow creep about and gather strength, nobody knows how ?

Captain Bouverie rallied a little after his daughter's engagement to the barrack-master. The debt that he owed to him might not now have to be paid for a much longer time than if there were to be no connection in the family. Clarke would never take law proceedings against his father-in-law, though he might do so against a friend. But still there was trouble enough for this poor head of the family at Evergreen.

Dawson Bouverie had got a hint that the sooner he should retire from the army the better it would be for him. The colonel of his regiment, being related to Allan Clarke, took a lenient view of several unpleasant occurrences in which the young man was implicated, and he was given permission to sell out of the service, rather than be obliged to leave

it in a more disgraceful manner. So his name appeared in the *Military Gazette* at this time as retiring from his profession; and all his friends at Norham knew very well that he must have been a scapegrace to be forced to sell out after such a few years of service as he had seen; and they pitied his father and mother, and shook their heads as they thought of the crash coming on the family at Evergreen. Indeed, some people were in a high state of expectancy and excitement about the crash—hoping that it would come quickly, and wishing of all things that the villa and its furniture might have to be sold. At the club, where the gentlemen of Norham gossiped considerably, the matter was canvassed with shrugging shoulders by elderly men of about Captain Bouverie's age; and although they spoke of him as "Poor Bouverie," they felt very little real pity for him. They said he had brought his son up foolishly, that he should have put him into some money-making profession, rather than the army, which was only fit for men of fortune; and they all agreed, with a further shrugging of shoulders and a sort of secret satisfaction that they were not responsible for the young man's

conduct, that Dawson Bouverie would now, in all probability, go altogether "to the bad."

Captain Bouverie was very much ashamed and humbled, and he did not like to go out much, or to frequent the club as of old. His clothes were getting a little shabby, too, and his hair very grey—though, till within the last few months, there were few traces of silver perceptible among his dark locks.

Ellinor's heart was very sad when she looked at his fast-altering appearance, and she tried not to feel annoyed at what he said that was unjust and unreasonable, and to overlook all his selfishness and disregard for her own welfare and happiness.

Dora seemed very indifferent about the preparations for her marriage, though she did not speak of wishing to delay it. She, who had formerly been anxious to procure becoming dresses, and to attract particular admiration, now appeared strangely careless as to her *trousseau*. For a long while, neither she nor her sister alluded to such things as wedding garments, but Mrs Dart roused them up from this state of apathy, and suggested the necessity of bestirring themselves.

"Your father won't be stingy at such a

time as this, I hope," she said, "as even if a girl makes a bad match, or an indifferent one, it is always well to make a show at the wedding. I remember when Tom Finbury's daughter married Jack Churchmouse, who hadn't twopence to begin with, the mother had such a splendid wedding for the pair that it quite imposed upon everybody, and people said there hadn't been anything like it seen at Norham for years. You might remember it yourselves, for you were not so very young at the time. There were twelve bridesmaids, and they had such work to get a dozen girls who wouldn't cut out the bride as to looks that they were obliged to beg poor old Mrs. Perkins to let her daughter be one of them, and both she and the girl were as proud as peacocks, but everyone knew the bridesmaids were invited according to their ugliness. Mrs. Finbury was always such a manœuvrer, though never gaining anything by her scheming. Now, I hope, Dora, you won't have more than *four* bridesmaids, but that you will wear a handsome dress, and get it made at Norham, because it is all airs and conceit employing London dressmakers and milliners, particularly when you won't be able to

keep up that kind of extravagance. I used to think you might have married richer and higher; but, perhaps, after all, this match is as good as you could have expected. Clarke is a very respectable man, and his income is far better than ever your father's was; besides, he ranks pretty high, though it seems a mean sort of thing to be a store-keeper, or whatever they call him; and, between you and me, I have heard curious stories of his goings-on as to the storekeeping, but I suppose I am not to talk so freely before his bride elect. Heigho! girls cannot always climb up so high as they expect; but people must be contented with their lot. What a rare thing it is for a woman to make a great match! For one that marries a man of better rank than her own father, there are a dozen or a score that marry men of lower grade; yet girls are always so upsetting when they begin life first."

Had Dora been listening to Mrs. Dart's remarks, they might have annoyed her; but she was either thinking of something else, or of nothing at all, for she certainly did not hear a quarter of what that poor, spiteful woman was saying; but Ellinor heard it all, and

winned under a good deal of it—feeling, perhaps, that Mrs. Dart was not altogether wrong in what she said.

To the direct inquiry as to how many bridesmaids she should have, Dora replied that she did not want any at all, unless Ellinor would attend her in that capacity; that she wished to be married quite privately, and was anxious for no display or silly show.

Mrs. Dart, consequently, said “Humph!” and looked offended and suspicious and inquisitive, eyeing the young girl with queer, sharp glances, as if she conjectured that there was something very doubtful, indeed, in this apathy and indifference to outward appearance. Then, being in ill-humour, she made many more cutting observations, saying that if there was any paltriness or stinginess about the wedding people would believe the reports that had lately been spread through Norham to the effect that they were a ruined family, and over head and ears in debt.

“Let them say what they like,” said Dora, contemptuously; “I do not care a straw for their evil speaking—I do not care a straw!”

“Perhaps they are not so far wrong in their conjectures and reports,” said Mrs.

Dart, looking flushed and angry. "Perhaps your father cannot spare what would give you a proper wedding *trousseau*, or a proper wedding *dejeuner*!"

"Perhaps he cannot," replied the provoking Dora; "but at all events, I shall not ask whether he can or not. It is my own wish to be married quietly, and I suppose I can have a choice at least in this matter."

"Oh! of course, of course," said Mrs. Dart; "and perhaps you are quite right. There is nothing to be so very proud of in the marriage. The more private it is kept, no doubt the better. I admire your sense." Mrs. Dart was very angry.

One evening Lucy Barr walked over to Evergreen, and asked to see Miss Bouverie; and Ellinor, thinking that at least her gentle little workwoman could have nothing to say to her that was disagreeable or spiteful, agreed to speak with her.

Now, if Lucy thought Miss Bouverie altered within the last few weeks, and looking much thinner and paler than formerly, Miss Bouverie could scarcely help wondering at the changed and sobered aspect of Lucy.

"I beg your pardon for coming to you,

Miss Bouverie," said the girl, humbly and respectfully; "but I thought I might venture to ask for your advice, as you used to be so good to me, always teaching me wise things and how to act right. You know, Miss Ellinor, I never thought anyone had as much sense as yourself."

Ellinor smiled sadly; Lucy's words seemed indeed like satire, scarcely in disguise either. "You may tell me anything you like, Lucy," she said, gently. "I shall be glad if I can be of any use to you."

"The children at the Sunday-school were afraid you were going to give them up, miss, it is so long since you were teaching them," resumed Lucy; "but Mr. Trydell taught your class himself ever since you went to Halesby Park. I suppose he thought the girls were too far advanced for any other teacher."

"He told me he should secure some one to instruct them in my place," said Miss Bouverie, "and perhaps he was unable to get anyone else."

"I don't know, indeed, miss; but I am sure he could not get such a teacher as you in all the town."

"Indeed, he could get many far better

than I am, Lucy," said Ellinor, sighing: "you must not consider me above other people. You were only a silly little girl when you first took that idea into your head."

"It is not I alone who think you wise and good, but everybody, Miss Bouverie, and so I have ventured to walk over and tell you of some troubles that are come upon us at home—upon me in particular, Miss."

"Troubles everywhere!" thought Ellinor, as Lucy ceased to speak, and hastily brushed a tear from her eye.

"Now, you see, miss," continued the girl, "that my father hasn't been working much latterly, and he isn't earning anything to speak of. Indeed, to say the truth, he isn't earning what you might call anything at all, and there's a great scarcity of money with us at present, and mother's afraid the boys must be taken from school."

"How distressing!" said Ellinor, who was growing interested at last in what her companion said to her.

"Oh! very distressing, indeed, miss," added Lucy, earnestly, "and it's all owing to some disagreement between father and Mr. Clarke.

You will forgive me, miss, for saying so, though I know Miss Dora is very soon to be married to that gentleman. But, oh ! Miss Bouverie, he is a very hard man to deal with as regards poor people ; of course, it may be different with others, for I know there are ladies and gentlemen who think it isn't necessary to be as particular in their actions to the lower orders as it is to the rich. You know how differently people speak to those that are their equals to what they do to their inferiors, and Mr. Clarke is one of those gentlemen, miss, that don't care how they speak to a tradesman. I hope you will pardon me for saying so, though I, for one, never, never could make up my mind to believe that Miss Dora would ever be his wife."

"It is all settled, now, Lucy," said Ellinor, who thought it prudent to speak cheerfully of the matter. "Miss Dora made her own choice."

"Oh ! miss, did she ? I just used to think, if it was true that she would marry him at all, that she might have been persuaded into it in a manner. It seemed you know, miss, so strange that a beautiful young lady like her should leave her own home, and her

father and mother, and you, miss, all for the sake of such a ——. Well, miss, there is no use in talking. Mr. Clarke may make a better husband than one might suppose from his general behaviour; for, to my mind, he seems the very sternest, most unfeeling sort of gentleman I ever saw. I certainly hope and pray that he will be kind and good to Miss Dora. He could never have expected such luck as to get a beautiful young lady for a wife like what she is.”

“It may be all for the best, Lucy,” said Ellinor, who could not even make a show of being annoyed at the girl’s naive remarks upon her sister’s affianced husband; “but I trust your father will try to please Mr. Clarke, for I believe he has a great deal in his power.”

“Oh! a great deal, miss, and I’m afraid it is too late now to go back of anything father has said or done; and the worst of it is father doesn’t wish to go back of it; he seems possessed of some strange spirit of late, thinking of nothing but revenge, and returning evil for evil. We are so unhappy at home, miss, that you couldn’t believe it. The rich may have their cares as well as the poor; but,

after all, Miss Bouverie there is nothing like the fear of such poverty as may come into a house and rob a family of bread and ever such homely food, and leave them helpless on the world!"

"But there is no such fear as that for your family, Lucy?" said Ellinor.

"Indeed there is, miss. The money is going so fast—no one can tell how. You know it is easy to spend a little bit of capital for rent and food when there is no income to help it. We were a little in debt, too, and that took away a good deal of the money."

"I always thought your mother was very economical," observed Miss Bouverie.

"So she is, miss; but you see the money isn't hers. It may not be the same in your rank of life; but, among the poor people like us, the husband has power over all the money and savings of both himself and his wife; and so, you see, mother can't lay by anything, and the money in the bank is all in the name of my father. Of course he takes it out whenever he pleases; but, I believe, it will soon be all gone."

"I am very sorry to hear such a sad account of your family," said Ellinor, gravely,

“and I suppose you can do nothing but a little needlework to help yourself or your mother?”

“The needlework is but a poorly-paid labour,” replied Lucy, smiling sadly; “and with the new sewing machines that are coming into fashion there will soon be even less want of sempstresses than there is now. I was thinking, miss, of turning my hand to something more profitable than shirt-making or millinery—something more in my father’s line of business, for I can upholster furniture, and understand the whole trade, because I have been watching it, you may say, for seventeen or eighteen years; and, by employing men to do the rough work that’s too heavy for me, I could get on well, as I can give directions, and do all the fine work myself, for it is the fine neat work that pays best.”

“And why don’t you work and assist your father now,” asked Ellinor.

“Mother won’t allow it, nor father either, for that matter; and, at all events, people are not employing father now. Mr. Clarke has turned the military all against him, and you know in a small town like Norham there are few customers but the officers.”

“But it would take some capital to set up in any trade,” said Ellinor. “Unless you had a few hundred pounds you would find it hard to begin any business of importance.”

“I know that, miss,” observed Lucy, who did not wish to reveal all her secret plans at once; “but I might commence on a small scale at first. There was another little matter that I wished to speak about to you, if you will be so kind as to permit me, miss.” And, having received permission, the girl proceeded to tell Miss Bouverie about the love and courtship of the young corporal of Lancers, who had won her heart, and who was now disabled, and without the means of working any longer for his daily bread.

“The story is a very long one, miss,” she said, “but it would make your heart sick to hear it. The young man had a sister, very beautiful and highly-educated, a governess in London, and she met in some way (the brother didn’t know how) a dreadful, designing man, calling himself a gentleman, who persuaded her to commit a forgery, and get a large sum of money for him by fraudulent means; and so the brother happened to find

out this person in London, and he met him, and they had a desperate fight, which ended in the corporal being nearly killed by his antagonist. Indeed, he says, he was left for dead in a dyke on Grimsby Common, and was conveyed to the nearest hospital next morning, but one of his hands, which was dreadfully hurt, had to be cut off."

"What was the corporal's name?" asked Ellinor, whose heart was sinking within her.

"Hammersly, Miss—Thomas Hammersly; and his sister's name was Rachel."

"And you heard this story from himself, and from no one else?" said Ellinor, laying her hand, with an involuntary movement, on Lucy's arm.

"From no one else in the world, miss. He wrote it to me himself, for he has still the use of his right hand, and he is now able to write with it. He speaks of bringing the wicked man who induced his sister to commit such a crime to justice, and having him punished, which I think would be quite right. Don't you, miss?"

But Miss Bouverie did not answer. She was unable to utter a word. Lucy Barr's

information had been too much for her to bear unmoved, yet she made a great effort to preserve composure.

Lucy noticed nothing but the young lady's silence, for it was by this time too dark for her to observe how ghastly pale her face was. The girl may not have been surprised that Ellinor was shocked at the distressing account she gave of what had befallen her lover. How many tears had not his misfortune caused herself—how many days and nights of agonising grief, soothed only by the hope that she could prove her love and truth by keeping faithful to him, and trying to work for him while she had the use of her own hands!

CHAPTER II.

ABRAHAM BARR'S PROGRESS TOWARDS REVENGE.

ELLINOR BOUVERIE had hoped that her father might never learn how dishonourably Dawson had behaved in the matter of Rachel Hammersly's forgery, but every day the delinquencies of her brother seemed making themselves more public.

At this time a letter from Lady Halesby reached Captain Bouverie, informing him, in her own hard, cold way, of what she knew his son to be guilty of, and asking what reparation he could make for his ill conduct; and further stating her surprise that the young

man had been so carelessly brought up as to be capable of such a want of principle and common honesty as he had displayed. This letter rendered the unhappy father very miserable and very angry, and he blamed Ellinor for not having told him of all that Lady Halesby had now made known to him; but Ellinor scarcely said a word to excuse herself, so great was her commiseration for her father, and her wish not to irritate him. His wrath, nevertheless, was very great, and he wrote a hasty, rather ill-judged answer to Lady Halesby's letter—such an answer as Ellinor felt assured would render it impossible for any friendly intercourse ever again to exist between the family at the Park and her own. Captain Bouverie read out his letter for her, and she had to listen to it, and to forbear making the smallest commentary upon its contents, even though she was convinced that it was giving the final blow to all the brightest hopes of her life—hopes that were very nearly altogether dead before.

It seemed a strange coincidence that Lucy Barr's lover, of whom she came to speak to Ellinor, should be the brother of Rachel Hammersly, the chance wanderer who had

strayed to the Halesby gate-lodge, and whose coming there should have proved so disastrous to the Bouveries. Things seemed to be working together to bring Ellinor Bouverie down to utter humiliation and despair, and her fortitude was giving way lamentably.

As may be imagined, Dora Bouverie was scarcely any happier on the eve of her marriage than her sister was. She had fixed the time for her own doom, yet every passing day that brought the time nearer, she felt the awfulness of the step she was about to take in greater force.

Mrs. Dart and Mrs. Sharpont were all full of curiosity and eagerness to know the why and the wherefore of the business, and why Dora should prefer the barrack-master to anyone else; and, perhaps, they, as well as some others of her acquaintances, began to entertain suspicions that, after all, she probably had not as many admirers, or opportunities of marrying rich or poor men, as was before supposed. Indeed, several people came to the conclusion that she was not such a pretty girl as had been imagined; there had been a good deal of delusion in the general supposition that she was more than tolerably good-

looking. In a week or so, it might be discovered that she was decidedly plain. Sir Ralph Barnard was very doubtful about the truth of the report of this approaching marriage of the barrack-master ; but he hoped sincerely that it was correct, and that his aide-de-camp might soon return to him in safety. Miss Barnard raised her eyebrows up, and smiled sweetly, though perhaps a little superciliously too, at the news. She wished it was Ellinor Bouverie that was going to marry Mr. Clarke, but her sister did nearly as well. A very fastidious person of high rank would not be likely to tolerate a near connection with the ordnance storekeeper. Probably poor Ellinor thought something of that sort herself, when Dora told her she was going to marry Mr. Clarke. Pride is the deepest-rooted almost of all feelings, and it is a universal one among human beings, civilised and uncivilised, in nearly every part of the habitable world. Ellinor Bouverie tried to be a Christian, and to read her Bible in faith and humility, but she could not altogether steel her heart against the influences that had surrounded her from childhood. Ellinor was aware that her family in times of old had been

far more influential than it was now. Want of money had kept her father and mother sadly down in the world, as it keeps many persons down; and now it seemed to her that Dora's marriage with Mr. Clarke would sink them lower than ever they had been. If she or her sister were to make a high match, it would elevate the whole family; but there was no prospect of that at present. A marriage such as was about to take place now would render it, perhaps, impossible for any one of rank to wish to become connected with the family. These were weak thoughts, no doubt, for Ellinor to give way to, but she was merely human, and as such we must depict her, hoping the reader will judge her not too severely.

Certain unpleasant occurrences connected with Abraham Barr's endeavour to take revenge on him prevented Mr. Clarke coming as often to Evergreen as he might otherwise have done. The upholsterer had now arrived at the point of writing to high authorities respecting sundry suspicions existing that the barrack-master was acting nefariously in his position as ordnance storekeeper, and appropriating for his own private use certain

articles intended only for the service of the government; and although his information had so far produced no very serious results to his antagonist, it still had the effect of bringing to Mr. Clarke some extremely unpleasant letters of inquiry, requesting explanations of Abraham Barr's insinuations.

Affairs had now become so hostile between the barrack-master and upholsterer that the latter was almost altogether thrown out of his usual employment at the garrison, as Mr. Clarke went about to inform the military of his "infamous extortion," "his impertinence," and his "disregard of truth," and to make it a personal request that he should be dismissed from all further occupation at the barracks. The barrack-master, moreover, with an energetic desire to crush the cabinet-maker with effect, introduced to the officers another man of the same calling who lived in the town, but whose name was not yet known so well as Barr's in connection with the upholstery business. So far, the unfortunate Abraham was getting by far the worst of the enmity and quarrelling. Never did the power of the barrack-master appear greater than now, when he could show it in full sway; yet if there

were ever times when Barr regretted the ruin he was bringing upon himself, they were few indeed.

It was pretty well known at Norham by this time that Barr and Mr. Clarke were working hard against each other, and there were a goodly number of persons who believed more than half what the former said of the latter. Mr. Trydell felt that the upholsterer was acting a very unwise part, and he more than once endeavoured to remonstrate with him, and point out how ineffectual any efforts of his would be to injure the barrack-master seriously.

"He must leave Norham, Mr. Trydell," declared Abraham. "I'll have it in my power to remove him from his employment here. If there is such a thing as justice in the world, that man's career of dishonesty must come to a close quickly."

"You surely do not consider Mr. Clarke dishonest?" said the chaplain in surprise.

"Ay—dishonest and mean and griping—with false statements of weights and false accounts; and trading with the government money by purchasing bad, cheap articles, and setting them down as the best and

dearest. Haven't I got proofs of all this?—proofs enough to get the man expelled with ignominy and disgrace from any position of trust. I'll soon have the whole list of accusations against him filled up, and then I'll demand an explanation of his conduct. The authorities will send down gentlemen to inquire into the truth of my statement, and they will find them all correct to the letter.”

“But if nothing can be proved against Mr. Clarke, how sad the result of all these accusations and investigations must be to you, Barr!” said Mr. Trydell.

“Oh, I'll be able for the result, let it be what it may,” declared Abraham, wrinkling up his care-worn face into the semblance of a smile. “It will take a great deal to put me down—a very great deal.”

“But you should think of your family, your wife and children, you know,” urged the chaplain, quietly.

“Truth and justice above all other considerations,” said Barr, folding his arms in their shabby coat sleeves. “Truth and justice above everything in the world! And surely no one ought to know that maxim better than

a minister of the Gospel, Mr. Trydell." And he cast a somewhat doubtful glance at the minister of the Gospel before him. Indeed Mr. Trydell's remonstrances, from time to time, with the upholsterer upon the subject of his disagreement with Mr. Clarke were gradually tending to lessen the confidence of Barr in his lodger's general character and capabilities, and to strengthen sundry misgivings that he had previously felt regarding him.

Formerly Abraham had been a regular attendant at church on Sundays, but of late he was falling off in that respect. He was neglecting both his spiritual and temporal interests for the gratification of a revenge that might tend to his ruin.

"Abraham, you are going in a wrong way," said his wife, over and over again; "give up this disputing, and profitless seeking for what you may not find, and settle to something useful."

And once, in reply to such speeches, Barr clenched his hand in wrath, and his face darkened as he said—

"Nothing can turn me now from what I've begun. Either Clarke or I will not be at Norham after the next three months. How-

ever it may be, one or other of us will have left it."

And then the broken-hearted wife looked hopelessly at the rugged, wrathful, determined face of her husband, and shaking her head kept silent, but the words just spoken rested long in her memory; they came back to her thoughts in the hours of night when she lay sleepless, racking her brain as to the future; they came back in days long after, when the horror of a terrible dread was overpowering her, and doubts of the darkest kind making her existence scarcely endurable.

CHAPTER III.

THE WEDDING MORNING—PATTY'S
PHILOSOPHY.

THE preparations for Dora Bouverie's marriage were completed, the morning fixed upon for the wedding arrived—a dark morning, cloudy, dismal, with a stealthy, noiseless rain dripping from the grey sky—a morning that made Patty, the servant at Evergreen, shake her head, and go about her early work with a feeling of grave misgiving; for she had her superstition concerning rain on wedding-days, and sunshine on burial days. Would the sun come forth, even for half an hour, on that

chilly morning? Would there be a spark of brightness over the dusky sky?

"I don't like the look of the day, miss," she said, as Miss Bouverie made her appearance downstairs; "it isn't cheersome at all."

"We must make the best of it, Patty," replied Ellinor, who was shivering and wretched, owing to her not having closed her eyes almost through the whole of the past night.

"There's no best to be made out of it, miss," said the girl, dejectedly, "and it would have been so pleasant for the sun to have shone on Miss Dora's bright hair this morning!"

"I am afraid the sun coming out would not make much difference as to her happiness, Patty," said Ellinor, smiling, very faintly this time.

"It would point out what was to be, you know, miss," continued the girl, as she paused in her work and looked full at the young lady. "There's a great deal in signs and tokens; and a sunshiny wedding-day has a great deal of meaning in it."

"Only to the superstitious, Patty; and if they were wise they would soon find out how

useless it was to put faith in such nonsense. There are weddings every day somewhere or other, and the weather is very changeable and uncertain."

"That may be, miss, but it don't alter what I say. If there's a deal of rain there's a deal of unhappy marriages, and it's most likely they come off on the dark, wet days. I thought it bad enough for Miss Dora to fix her wedding for a Friday, but I think it far worse now when the Friday is so dismal. Dear, dear, will that fire ever kindle up to-day! and there, such a lump of soot has fallen!"

"Patty, will you tell me a lucky day to begin with?" asked Miss Bouverie. "A great many pursuits which are commenced on Friday may possibly turn out badly; but what day is there that the same might not be said of?"

"There's no day like Friday among the whole seven of the week, miss," persisted Patty. "Believe in my words. My family, you know, miss, live near the river at Norham, and I have a brother, a sailor in a coal vessel, that could tell you stories of Friday that would make your flesh creep, and your hair stand on end.

"Which would be very unbecoming for me on a wedding-day, Patty," said Ellinor, whose flesh was creeping sufficiently already without the assistance of weird tales. Soft and smoothly enough lay the dark hair on her white forehead; yet there were thoughts within her heart of hearts that might have made her hair stand on end, if sad forebodings and most wretched misgivings could have had such an effect.

"Could it be possible just to put off the wedding till to-morrow, miss, or is it too late now?"

"Very much too late, indeed, Patty," said Miss Bouverie.

"Word couldn't be sent up to Mr. Clarke and the clergyman?"

Ellinor shook her head.

"People cannot so be fickle as all that, Patty, unless they choose to make themselves appear extraordinary."

"The world is a strange place anyways, miss," said Patty, turning the urn round to polish the other side of it. "And it often appears to me that there's a deal of suffering in it, and very little happiness. Sometimes here at my work, or of a long winter evening

when I am sitting alone at the fire, just before going to bed, such queer thoughts come into my head !”

“ What sort of thoughts, Patty ?”

“ Oh, just about anything. Supposing the beetles and clocks are walking up the grate, or coming out over the floor, I wonder (you know, miss, I can’t help it), I wonder what the good of them is, especially if everything is made for man ? I suppose, miss, there’s something made for woman too, don’t you think ?”

“ Of course I do ; man means woman as well as man—mankind, you know, Patty.”

“ Well, it ain’t very plain that man is woman, miss ; but if you say so, no doubt it is correct. I often think, too, along with the beetles, that may be when the language was first invented, the old people long ago didn’t just think women were entitled to have anything made for them ; and that what they called man didn’t mean anything in the world but just man, and never a woman at all. And it’s not to say altogether the ancient people long ago that had queer notions about women being nothing like, but there’s a deal of persons living this minute that think and say the very same.”

Patty now looked up at the sky from the kitchen window, but there was nothing cheering to be seen there. One uniform, leaden hue overspread it, and the noiseless rain continued to drip remorselessly. The fire was decidedly sulky that morning, and refused to burn up brightly; altogether, it was not a brilliant day for a wedding. Had it been ever so fine, Ellinor Bouverie could not have felt less wretched than she was then, and probably she would have been chilled and shivering from the nervous state of her mind had the weather been of summer warmth.

Dora Bouverie had decided upon having a very simple, private wedding — so private that none but her own immediate family were to be in attendance. She was particularly anxious to keep Mrs. Dart and Mrs. Sharpoint from being at it, and therefore she was obliged to exclude all else but her father and mother and sister. Had she wished to have a grand wedding, with much display, and a great many bridesmaids, she could have been amply satisfied, for Captain Bouverie would have made any exertion or sacrifice to please her at this time; but she did not wish it, and it was agreed that the marriage should take

place at the old parish church of Bampton, about three miles from Norham.

“Shall we ask Mr. Trydell to officiate at the ceremony?” Ellinor had asked one day when the wedding was being discussed.

“No,” answered Dora. “I do not wish it. I shall be married by some clergyman whom I scarcely know, even by sight. Mr. Wedderburn, the parish rector, will just suit me, and we shall not grudge him the fee. I dare say Mr. Clarke will pay him very liberally.”

“It is a pity that you would not prefer Mr. Trydell to marry you.”

“Ellinor, do not say anything more about that. I know my own mind perfectly in this respect.”

There were very few times that Dora Bouverie did not think she knew her own mind perfectly upon all subjects, and certainly, I suppose, there are not many persons who are ignorant upon such a point regarding themselves. The young lady, who was so soon to be a bride, had very decided views now and then, and had deeper thoughts than people would have generally have believed, for her style of appearance—her fair complexion, blue eyes, and golden hair, are associated in

most minds with shallow ideas and shallow feelings; yet who has not seen the light blue eye glitter with intense anger? or who has not known of extreme reserve of thought being concealed beneath a superficial aspect of frankness and simplicity?

Occasionally Dora Bouverie was open-hearted and out-spoken enough, but this was just as it suited her to be so. Upon any very important subject, involving serious consequences, she could be as secret as the grave, if it were necessary.

Of course Dawson Bouverie was not to be present at his sister's wedding, as he was not at Norham; his family scarcely knew where he was. His father was annoyed with him, and extremely distressed; yet he was still forming plans for the prodigal's benefit, and worrying his brain as to what could be done for him to procure a livelihood and a position in the world. Let us not quarrel with this intense love of a father for a son, even though it led to such lamentable results, and even to injustice towards his other children. It was very sad to see Captain Bouverie poring over schoolboy letters, written to him from Eton by Dawson in bygone days, and

trying to find some comfort in believing that at least his son had been good and honourable then, even though the bad example of other men might have taught him to behave disgracefully of late. Alas! poor father, he made a great mistake in believing that Dawson had ever been amiable or well-principled. His behaviour at home might have told what his heart and his head were; for, in spite of the general impression that where there is a deficiency in strength of brain, there is a proportionate strength of feeling in the heart, I must say that, from all experience and observation of my own, it has appeared that persons of low intellect are almost invariably wanting in real kindness of heart and warmth of affection. The more intelligent animals even of the brute species, are generally the most affectionate, and the easiest to tame. It requires more comprehension than most people are aware of, either to understand the kindness of others, or to be kind oneself. A tendency to cruelty and a want of natural feeling are often the earliest and most marked symptoms of disease and destruction of the brain.

There was to be no elaborate breakfast

upon this wedding morning at Evergreen, and, to tell the truth, nobody there regretted it, except, perhaps, Patty, who would have liked to see gay dresses and strange ladies and gentlemen, and behold wonderful dishes, procured from the chief confectioner at Norham, who always made the wedding cakes for the neighbourhood. It would have delighted Patty to have been able to point out her young lady's wedding-cake — large, and covered thickly with an encrustation of lime and sugar, and adorned with frosted, elaborately poisoned flowers and figures—as she passed by the said confectioner's windows with friends; and to have told them that she was the honoured servant in the house where the bride dwelt; for if there is one person above another who thinks much of a bride on her wedding-day, or of a bride-elect, just before that important morning, it is a servant maid. If the bride were to go to the altar in an ordinary, everyday costume, the matter would be very different, indeed. And so, by all means, let brides continue to go shivering to church in all kinds of weather on their wedding-days, dressed in light garments, as if they were going to a heated ball-room

rather than a damp church; because otherwise there would not be half the sensation created about a marriage that exists at present. If soldiers did not wear gaudy coats and trappings, think you we should be able to procure recruits for the service as easily as they are procured now? Love of a red coat does far more to send youths into the army than a love of country or glory; and probably, in like manner, a love of wearing a remarkably beautiful costume, with such a veil and wreath as was never worn before, does a good deal towards sending young ladies into the estate of matrimony.

Brides are generally said to look well on their wedding-days, except by the ultra-envious and malicious. Dora Bouverie really did look beautiful, though as pale and white almost as the dress she wore. She was one of those people whom nervousness does not affect in an unbecoming manner, though it might rob her of her blooming colour. Her eyes seemed darker than usual—the blue so very deep in hue that it looked almost black. Ellinor did not like to meet those eyes all that morning, though she dressed their owner with her own hand, and twisted and braided

her beautiful hair, feeling all the time as if she were adorning her for a sacrifice. The bride's hands did not tremble near so much as her sister's did; for the bride felt as if turned to stone, and as if she should never feel again as she had done of old.

Secret as the grave, indeed, the bride had proved herself during many past weeks, keeping back from her dearest friend, Ellinor, what she was suffering from agony of spirit; yet pursuing the course she had chosen to follow with a perseverance that never swerved or declined. Not one word of all that had occurred concerning herself and Mr. St. George had she ever breathed to her sister. All that weight of misery and mortification she was bearing and had borne in solitude, without having any creature to sympathise with her, from day to day, ever since the time that she had despaired utterly of getting an answer to the letter she had sent to Rodney St. George at Gartoquil, in Ireland. How much she had blamed herself for having written that letter her own heart alone could understand; but certain it was that there was a great deal of self-reproach mingled with her other unhappy feelings upon the subject.

Mr. St. George had not returned to his duties at Norham as yet, and nobody there, except, perhaps, the Barnards, knew when he might come back. Perhaps he had heard the news of Dora Bouverie's approaching marriage with Mr. Clarke, or perhaps he had not. Dora herself wondered sometimes if he had heard it, and what his impression of her was. Would he divine that her acceptance of the barrack-master was caused by pique, or would he think that she had never been quite in earnest about receiving his addresses, and had all along intended to marry Allan Clarke?

What did it signify now what his thoughts might be? Alas! what?

Dora's wedding-dress was very beautiful and costly, and Mr. Clarke had made her rich presents of jewellery; but all this finery seemed to her like so much tawdry foolery and nonsense, and in the confusion of her hurried toilet (or, perhaps on purpose) she omitted to wear the handsome pearl necklace which the barrack-master had given to her, which omission he was the first to remark himself, though he said nothing on the subject at the time. The day never cleared up

or grew any brighter from first to last. It rather grew more violently rainy, and a storm of wind arose which drove the rain through the carriage windows of the bridal party, and sent it spattering over the bride's dress.

No doubt, Patty was in despair as she watched the weather in which her young ladies and their father left the house; and she thought to herself that she had never seen a sadder-looking bride among high or low than Miss Dora was when she turned round, just before going to the carriage, and gave a last look at the house, and a little smile to Patty—a smile that sat but ill, the girl thought, on her white lips, for they had grown quite white then.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BRIDE LEAVES HER OLD HOME.

PATTY's faint hope that something might come to put Miss Dora's marriage off was in vain. Even though the morning was stormy, and the distance to Bampton Church three miles, the bridal party reached it in safety ; and, so far from the bridegroom not arriving in time, he was there fully three-quarters of an hour before the bride appeared. Had she been five minutes later, the ceremony could not have legally taken place that day. Did she ever wish, think you, reader, that she had been those five minutes late ?

Mr. Wedderburn, the old rector of Bamp-

ton, who had officiated at a great many marriage ceremonies since he began his clerical career about fifty years previous to that remarkable morning, went through his duty without experiencing any particular interest in the matter. Perhaps he might have thought, *en passant*, of what had become of all the people whom he had joined together in wedlock since he had become a minister of the Gospel, and if the ceremonial prayer he had so often repeated, asking a blessing on each newly-wedded couple, had been answered in even a few cases ; but, as he was not a man given much to reflection, it is just as probable that he thought of nothing of the kind.

The ceremony was soon over—the bride having pronounced her responses to the questions put to her by the aged minister so indistinctly that the affirmatives might have sometimes been negatives for all the hearers could distinguish of the words ; yet she was really not very nervous—she had got beyond that state. The bridegroom, on the contrary, spoke out bravely, with an air that seemed to say “ Catch *me* not knowing my own mind !”

The bridal party left the church in a

greater storm of rain and wind than they had arrived at it in, and the postillions muttered execrations as they urged their smoking horses to draw the carriages swiftly back to Norham. Had there been an accident to any of the party in returning home it would not have been marvellous; but there was nothing of the sort. Patty saw her young ladies coming back safely; but somehow she could not bring herself to think that Miss Dora was Mrs. Clarke when she laid eyes on her next.

“Dear me! and I used to think she would be my lady, or something very high, indeed!” thought the poor, bewildered servant. “For she was undeniably the greatest beauty ever seen at Norham! She has thrown herself altogether away this dismal Friday!”

It was a sorrowful moment to Ellinor when she saw her sister drive away that morning from her old home. The villa seemed very deserted now, though in all probability had Dora been in it, she should have been upstairs in her own room, sitting, as was her custom latterly, in solitude; but Ellinor fancied it more lonely and desolate than usual. It seemed to her as if there was a hush over the

hall and staircase—a sense of desolation to be experienced everywhere that her sister's feet had trodden so lately.

Up in the chamber which the sisters had shared for so many years, this feeling of sad loneliness was, of course, still more remarkable than elsewhere. Traces of recent packings were here, and scraps and shreds of paper and other things lying about, with here and there an old dress formerly worn by Dora, hanging on the walls, or a garden hat or bonnet resting on some spot where her own hands had thrown it carelessly. All these things gave pangs to Ellinor's heart; and she removed the hat and bonnet gently, as though they had belonged to the dead, and took down the gowns, and placed them where she might not see them quickly again. But, in spite of all her usual carelessness and apparent thoughtlessness, Dora had left no shred or scrap of paper, torn ever so small, that could have told a particle of the secret she had kept so long from her sister. She had written copies upon copies of that one remarkable letter to Rodney St. George, yet she had destroyed them all, save one, which she had still in her possession, very safely packed among her

greatest treasures, though, whenever she had ventured to read it over latterly, it caused her to turn faint from mortification and misery, yet still she kept it, word for word the same as the one she had dispatched by Patty to the post office.

There was a hurried breakfast at Evergreen after the arrival there of the bridal party, and then the bride put on a sober travelling dress, with a great deal of fur about it, suitable to the temperature of the day; and, having expressed her disinclination to take a formal leave of any one in the villa, she went away with her husband, *en route* (as it is the fashion to say) for Paris.

All that Ellinor Bouverie could do after her sister's wedding, in order to appease the vexation of Mrs. Dart and Mrs. Sharpoint, who felt very much offended at not being invited to the wedding breakfast, was to bring them nearly all the bride-cake provided for that occasion, and a portion of every dainty that was on the table, besides a few others bought purposely by Miss Bouverie to present to her carping cousins. Still, they were not satisfied, though, if they had not got these good things, they would have stopped speak-

ing to anyone at Evergreen probably for some months. But they were not satisfied; and they called Ellinor to account for the negligence and infamous treatment they had met with. Had the young lady not brought them any peace-offerings she should have been spared a great deal of the scolding and bitter words directed to her as soon as she made her appearance at the Copse. To tell the truth, she expected pretty much what she got, and was somewhat prepared for the reception she met with.

“Now, you know, Ellinor,” said Mrs. Dart, “that though Dora might choose to have ever such a private wedding, she should have insisted upon *our* being invited to it. *We* were not everybody—we were some of her nearest relations, and certainly her best friends. I don’t believe her own mother had her interests at heart more than I had, and none should have understood that better than you and her, for you know how I walked continually all that long way to Evergreen, day after day, to see her. It was I who suggested her getting a *trousseau* at all. None of you were thinking of it—none of you spoke of it; and when I said it was time to prepare

it, she and you started up as if you had both been wakened out of a sleep. I don't believe that wedding would have gone off at all only for me. It wouldn't have taken place for three months more—maybe not for a year. I stirred you all up; I even spoke to Mr. Clarke one day at the gate, and I said, 'Well, when are you going to be married?' and he smiled, quite delighted, and said, 'Oh, I must leave that to the lady, Mrs. Dart.' But I know it made him think what he was about, and very likely induced him to urge her to fix the day. I always spoke of Dora as being the prettiest girl at Norham (though I can't say I thought so). I puffed her and you up everywhere, quite too much so, for I often was afraid people would find out that I wasn't speaking the truth. I said you, in particular, were a sincere, trustworthy girl—such a girl as anyone might be proud to marry. I told that to Mr. Skimpington and young Tom Saleswell; and, though, to tell the truth, they were both rather rude about it, and said that you and Dora weren't half as pretty as girls they had seen in London, and were more full of conceit than the greatest belles

in town (meaning London), yet still I persisted in telling them they might be proud to have you for their wives, and bore all their impudence just to benefit you ; for, though you may turn your nose up at a rich manufacturer's son, I can tell you he isn't to be despised. You can't expect every one to be Lord Halesby, or the Honourable Mr. This and That. So, after all my exertions on your behalf, after all my interest in Dora's marriage, after my long walks in the mud to Evergreen, after all my friendly remarks and hints upon every possible subject that occurred to me, you Ellinor, *you* permitted your sister to insult and wound me ; you allowed her to insult and wound my dear sister, Eliza Sharpont, who, as my sister, was entitled to consideration."

"I think I was owed a little on my own account, too," declared Mrs. Sharpont, bridling.

"I am sorry that you should have been offended," said Ellinor, who was actually trembling under this torrent of wrath, "but really it——"

"Oh, no excuse—no excuse!" returned

Mrs. Dart, lifting up her hands, and making a movement as if she were casting away something from them. "The facts are plain before our eyes—quite plain. Excuses can only make the matter worse. I was particularly anxious to see Dora in her wedding dress. I could have helped to dress her; it would not have been the first bride I dressed, for I wasn't always excluded from weddings, I can tell you. The time was when people would have been proud—yes, proud to have me at their weddings, when they would have excluded their own near relations rather than exclude me. I remember a sweet young creature—younger a great deal than you, or even Dora—Sally Parkins she was, and she said to me just before her marriage, 'Dear Maggy, you must come to my wedding, let who may or may not. There's not room for half my relations, but I would rather leave out my prying old Aunt Penelope than not have you.' That was something like a friend! But the world is not like what it was; the young girls are all selfish now-a-days; they even forget their relations, let alone their friends!"

"But we had not a creature at the break-

fast, except ourselves and Mr. Clarke," said Ellinor.

"But Mrs. Sharpoint and I were as much yourselves as any of you. Our being asked would not have made the wedding a public one. I don't say you need have asked your cousins, the Miss Holmbys, from over the bridge, nor old Mrs. Graydon, nor Miss Champenny; but to have excluded us was monstrous—that is the word for it—monstrous!"

Ellinor was so nervous that she excited Mrs. Dart's wrath further by dropping some raspberry sweatmeat from her parcel of good offerings over the poor, faded carpet of the Copse drawing-room; and then she was pushed about, and asked if she had lost the use of her hands, and treated as though she were a dependent of the elderly ladies whose annoyance she had come to soothe down—though, to tell the truth of these elderly ladies, they would not have treated a poor menial half so uncourteously. They reserved their stock of rudeness chiefly for those whom they considered better off than themselves, which is, perhaps, not a very common way of behaving.



Ellinor, nevertheless, gave her presents with as much composure as she could, and the ladies ate some of them, declaring the cake to be a somewhat inferior one, and the jelly the worst they had tasted for a long time, but seemingly to relish everything extremely. As they went on eating, their hearts softened a little towards Ellinor, and Mrs. Dart told her that though it was a disagreeable thing for a younger sister to "go off" before an elder, yet still good luck might be in store for her, and she might eclipse Dora in time—that is, if people did not say she was a great deal older even than she was, which was generally the case, when an elder sister was "passed over in that way."

"I have known girls like you that had their younger sisters—every one—married first, and yet they got off just as well in the end. Wait patiently; that is the way to do. I'll just try a little more of those almond biscuits. I wonder you got them at Purdon's; they are much better in the corner shop in North Street. I cannot forgive you for treating us so shamefully about the wedding; but I like to give you hints in a friendly spirit. When you are wanting jelly again—if ever you do

want it, be sure to get it at Simmons's; you got this at Purdon's, I suppose."

"No, indeed; we got it at Simmons's."

"Humph! In general they have it good there. Give me another piece of it — I had too small a bit of it to judge of that before—ah! thank you. That tastes really much better; yes, that tastes like Simmons's jelly—very like it. You are sure it was Simmons's?" inquired Mrs. Dart, who saw an irresistible inclination on her young relative's part to smile, and began to have doubts that she was hoaxing her; but Ellinor Bouverie never hoaxed anyone, though she could not always repress her amusement at the ridiculous or the absurd.

"Quite sure," she replied.

"How do you know?"

"Patty told me there was none at Purdon's."

"How? You ordered a wedding breakfast at a confectioner's, and they forgot the jelly!"

"We had no jelly at the breakfast," replied Ellinor, colouring a little. "I bought that on purpose for you and Mrs. Sharpoint. I thought you would like it."

“Indeed? I don’t care particularly for jelly; I am very fond of ice-cream, though. I daresay Patty told a falsehood about the jelly being Simmons’s; servants often do such things, they are so full of duplicity. Don’t believe a word of its being Simmons’s. I couldn’t have been mistaken about it, not for an instant!” And so trying to preserve the reputation of being infallible in her judgment concerning jelly and its makers at Norham, Mrs. Dart threw doubts upon the veracity of poor Patty, without, however, making much impression upon Miss Bouverie, who, after a martyrdom of an hour, returned homewards, gasping for breath, as she left the Copse.

CHAPTER V.

THE HONEYMOON—A DRIVE IN THE PARK.

EVERGREEN, of course, seemed very dull and sad at this time. Ellinor sat more with her mother than she used to do, because she felt that naturally the latter might feel lonely, like herself, and it pleased her to see that Mrs. Bouverie betrayed unwonted interest in the daily arrival of the postman, and seemed anxious to receive tidings of her absent daughter.

Dora did not write very often, and her letters were somewhat vague and shadowy. Either she could not, or would not describe

foreign scenes or foreign people; she had not the gift of conveying clear pictures in words, and she had not the inclination to write upon commonplace subjects—such as the price of chickens or the rent of lodgings. It was of very little consequence to her what the French people were like — whether they cheated or behaved honestly, whether the women dressed elegantly or the reverse. She understood, possibly, that she was stared at a good deal herself wherever she went in Paris, and perhaps she rather liked to gather knots of people about her in picture galleries or other public places, though her husband did not approve of it, and generally moved on when he perceived a group of people collecting round his beautiful young wife, who was as pretty a sight herself as any gallery of paintings could boast of; for her dress was pretty, and her figure was pretty, and her golden hair was pretty; and if the fair face wanted a little colouring, it was still a beautiful face. Not being entirely monstrous—not being, I am afraid, much worse than a great many other people, though she may appear somewhat monstrous as the heroine of a novel—Dora had a little bit of conscience,

and some notion of principle; and she knew that it was not quite fair to marry one man to vent her spite upon another—that she owed some kind of duty to the husband she had accepted, and was, therefore, bound to give up thinking, even in anger, of the person who had blighted her happiness, as she felt that Mr. St. George had blighted hers.

All the time of the honeymoon the newly-married pair did not quarrel. Dora had undergone a good deal of discipline for the last few months, and the habit she had lately got of thinking, enabled her to consider, now, what might be the safest course for her to pursue as regarded her own happiness, or rather an existence that could be tolerable to her; therefore she controlled her temper whenever it was ready to rise up in anger at any contradiction; though, to tell the truth, there was not much given to her at this time, except in some very trifling matters, and she tried to seem amused and pleased with new scenes and interesting landscapes, when, in reality, she cared nothing at all about them. This was not altogether from selfish motives either. She thought it incumbent upon her to appear satisfied, whether she

was or not, in order that her husband might not discover what a wretched choice he had made in taking her for his wife; but so far from being happy or contented, she was restless and miserable. She would have liked to travel for ever without stopping for more than a day in any one particular spot. She liked the swift rushing of railway carriages; and she left all the management of the luggage to her spouse, caring very little whether all her trunks were sent on to the wrong place, or left behind, or lost altogether. She did not feel uneasy about the expenditure of money as yet, because, somehow, she could not bring herself to consider that her own and her husband's interests were identical. As to the idea of keeping accounts, or making any inquiries as to what the travelling expenses were, it never entered her head. She went wherever she was brought very passively; and she shrank from saying a peevish or disagreeable word, because she knew very well that if she once began to quarrel or find fault, there would be no end of unpleasant consequences; therefore she was wise not to commence any misunderstanding that could be avoided.

She was glad when Mr. Clarke thought it time to leave Paris, and take her elsewhere; and she was glad when they left elsewhere for somewhere else; and when he asked her if she did not admire this place or that scene, she always said, "Oh, yes, very much," and pretended to take a great deal of interest in looking out of the *voiture* or railway carriage upon the objects pointed out.

Mr. Clarke had some near relatives in London, where he, at length, brought his bride, and one of these, a young married niece, named Chatterly, took him and his wife one day to drive in the park. Town was very full at this time, and Dora felt a little diverted by the gaiety and bustle around her, when suddenly her eye lit upon the figure of a gentleman on horseback, who was riding quite near, with a lady, among the throng. In an instant she knew him, and a feeling that seemed to her like that of death came over her. She became so faint that a mist gathered before her eyes, and for some minutes she could see nothing. With his usual quickness her husband saw the alteration in her appearance as he was sitting opposite to her, and with his usual quickness he

had also seen that she had turned suddenly away from looking at the people near her, with an expression of pain unmistakable, that led him to look exactly in the same direction as she had been gazing in, and he soon discovered the object that had caused her emotion.

Mr. Rodney St. George, on a very fine horse, had just slowly passed by, apparently absorbed in listening to the conversation of a very pretty girl with whom he was riding ; and no one in all that gay haunt of fashion and beauty looked more aristocratic or handsome than he did, dressed as usual to perfection, from the arrangement of his hair to the soles of his most exquisite boots. The young lady talking to him evidently thought so, and she was, doubtless, endeavouring to reward him for his attractiveness by making herself most remarkably agreeable. Yet a very close observer might have remarked that he was not paying much real attention to what she was saying to him, though his attitude, in bending slightly down to listen to her, looked, at a superficial glance, like devotion.

That *rencontre* in the Park was very unpleasant both to Mr. Clarke and his wife. It

brought back disagreeable recollections to each of them, and Dora's agitation was so apparent that there could be no mistake about it. The drive had lost all further power to divert or amuse her; the most fearful feeling of oppression and imprisonment seemed to come over her. For some minutes she forgot where she was, and who were with her. Her head seemed confused—her vision dim; but there was still an inexpressible weight of misery upon her mind—undefined, yet overwhelming misery.

Her husband became dull and gloomy, his brow a little contracted, and a thoughtful shadow over-spread his whole countenance. Had both of these newly-married people discovered what a mistake they had made in entering into a bond of union that could not be broken or cast off, and which must only be endured as best it might?

There had been times of late when the husband might have been led to believe that his wife would grow to love him, but this hope received a great blow from the incident that had occurred in the Park. A woman does not sink into an all but fainting state at the sight of an old admirer if she has forgotten his love-

making, or if she remember it only as an amusement of the past; yet he determined not to make the slightest allusion to the apparition of Mr. St. George in the Park. He was so far wary and cautious, and he would have patience and wait to see how matters would go on in the future.

It never entered Dora's head to think whether her agitation was observed or not. She was altogether self-absorbed and unconscious of everything but her own confused thoughts and feelings.

She had grown very much altered and subdued of late, chiefly owing to certain qualms of conscience that now and then pointed out to her that she was in a false position, and had taken a very desperate step in binding herself to a life that she might never become reconciled to. Except to a very hardened person indeed, the consciousness of wrongdoing is always depressing. Dora understood well that she herself was not the only person that was to be pitied concerning the marriage she had made. She believed that her husband loved her; and as he had done, as far as she knew, nothing particularly unworthy, she felt that she was not treating him altogether

well in regarding him with indifference, when he, probably, considered that she returned his affection warmly. So all these reflections subdued her a good deal, and made her feel humble, because her conscience was not easy.

Even now, when the unexpected sight of Rodney St. George disturbed her so much, her agitation was partly occasioned by the thoughts of her injustice to her husband, and the great error she had committed in marrying as she had done.

"How very hot the sun is occasionally, and yet what a bitter wind at times!" said Mrs. Chatterly, who was scarcely silent for half a minute at once. "There is a very pretty girl; I think I know her—I think it is Miss Cunningham. No, it is not. Who can she be? and that very handsome young man riding with her? Look! uncle, at that girl, and see if she is not very like Agnes Cunningham?"

Both husband and wife now looked from the carriage again, and saw once more Rodney St. George and his fair companion, who had attracted the attention of Mrs. Chatterly. Mr. St. George was very close to the carriage

now, and his eye caught sight of its occupants. He looked straight at Dora, but she made no sign of recognition, though for an instant their eyes met. The expression his face assumed was one which betrayed no great amount of agitation—it was rather haughty, and almost contemptuous; at least, Dora thought so; and then her pride arose, and a kindling light flashed into her eye.

“He dares to despise me, no doubt,” she thought; “but it is he who is far more despicable than I am. What I wrote to him was in full trust and confidence. Oh! he is mean, detestable, unprincipled! Papa warned me against such men. There he goes! Making love I suppose to that foolish girl beside him, who probably believes everything he is saying to her. When he succeeded in deceiving me, he may well deceive her, for there are not many girls as hard to be imposed upon as I was. How blindly I trusted that perfidious man! How completely he put me off my guard!”

Mr. St. George had not looked at Mr. Clarke as he passed; therefore, no salutation had taken place between them. Dora’s face, which had been pale before, now became

flushed, and her eyes grew bright, for she was angry and indignant. The expression which she either really saw, or fancied she saw, in her former lover's face, roused and mortified her. It was of a piece with his treatment of her all through, she thought.

"Did you think that girl like Agnes Cunningham?" asked Mrs. Chatterly.

"Not much," answered Clarke, who was biting his lip.

"I thought the gentleman with her looked as if he knew us," continued Mrs. Chatterly, who was generally on the *qui vive* about everything; "he seemed quite surprised when he looked into the carriage. I think he was chiefly looking at you, Dora."

"Yes, I daresay he was," replied Dora, boldly; "as it happens that he is an acquaintance—Mr. St. George, an officer on the staff at Norham."

"What a very good-looking person he is. I have seen no one so handsome for a long time. Is he of a good family—money?"

"Pretty good family, but not very rich," said Dora, trying to speak carelessly.

"I wonder you did not take a fancy to him; but I suppose I must not say that

before Uncle Allan. It was odd that he did not stop to speak to you. I should like to make his acquaintance, and to invite him to my next party, for I have not got very many attractive men for my parties at present, and I should like to take down the impudence of those that do come to them by exhibiting this most elegant creature, who seems made on purpose to break hearts. I am quite in love with him myself on the spot."

"I do not think he is such a desirable acquaintance, Mrs. Chatterly," said Dora, with sincerity; and instantly the cloud on her husband's brow seemed to clear away as she spoke. He looked at her a little scrutinizingly, however, to see if there was anything of hypocrisy in her words.

"Is he not really a nice person?" asked Mrs. Chatterly.

"Oh! nice enough as to appearance and manners, but otherwise nothing remarkable."

"But we don't want anything remarkable except manners and appearance at a *soiree* or ball, you know," continued Mrs. Chatterly; "unless a man is very unprincipled or dishonourable we forgive a great deal for the

sake of good looks and a good air. I like my parties to be select and *recherchés*; I like to gather around me all the beauty and fashion I can; so you must introduce him to John and me, and then we can ask him to dinner."

"Better never mind him, my dear Cherry," said Mr. Clarke; "you see he seemed to want to cut us all—did not look at us in the least, and never even touched his hat to us."

"But Dora did not recognise him, perhaps, in the first instance."

"No; certainly I did not. It never entered my head to bow to him; but I do not regret the omission. One cannot be expected to keep up an acquaintance with everybody one has known at all times. As we are always making new acquaintances, it stands to sense that we must drop the old ones, otherwise we should be overwhelmed with them all," said Dora, and her husband gave her an approving, but still very penetrating look, as she finished her sentence.

Before the drive was over that day Mr. Clarke regained some hope and comfort, but still he would have preferred that his wife had

not betrayed such agitation at the sight of her quondam admirer. All at once there had risen to his recollection many scenes of the past which had well-nigh driven him distracted—scenes at parties where Dora and St. George had danced nearly all night together, or sat talking in remote nooks, seeming to be altogether absorbed in each other's conversation; and then came the remembrance of other matters that weighed a little heavily on his own conscience—for perhaps he had an uneasy conscience like Dora—all this time, feeling that he had probably not acted fairly or justly towards her quite as forcibly as she felt her shortcomings towards him. Which had sinned the most against each other—she or he?

Which of them had the hardest reckoning to make up, think you, reader; the darkest account to settle with the other at some future day that might yet come?

The look of real or fancied scorn on Mr. St. George's countenance was still fresh in Dora's memory when she alighted from Mrs. Chatterly's carriage and took her husband's arm to walk a short way to the hotel where they were staying for the present. Perhaps

she felt a little comfort at that moment in the idea that at least she was protected from a good deal that might be annoying by being settled and married, and shielded from the world, which seemed vast and dreary enough in that large city of London, filled with its crowds of all descriptions of human beings, great and small, rich and poor, idle and busy.

Her husband was pleased when she placed her hand of herself within his arm, because she rarely, if ever, did so before; he felt soothed by the circumstance, and some of his gravest fears were in a great measure subdued.

Neither of them spoke of the person they were both thinking of so particularly—neither of them alluded to that meeting with Mr. St. George in the Park. Both were silent as they walked homewards, but Mr. Clarke did not consider that his wife was likely to remember her old flirtation with Sir Ralph Barnard's aide-de-camp with very serious feelings. His dread of that had greatly abated. Yet still there was a gloom over him; he had much to answer for, and he knew it. Had he behaved uprightly and honestly all through his court-

ship? Could he lay his hand upon his heart, and say with truth, "I have won my bride fairly, and in a straightforward manner. I never did anything from first to last of which I need feel ashamed as regards her?"

In the depths of his own soul he knew whether he could utter these words with a clear conscience.

CHAPTER IV.

THE INVESTIGATION—BARR'S DISCOMFITURE.

PEOPLE shook their heads when Abraham Barr's name was mentioned, and envious people were glad that he was getting no work to do, and was likely to be ruined, for in former days he had held his head very high, indeed, as a tradesman at Norham ; and I am not sure that he did not hold it in the same elevated position still, but people did not choose to look where he held it. The world is very matter-of-fact—it must have realities, and no shams to deal with. People knew the upholsterer was in a sort of disgrace, and had

lost custom at the barracks, and was consequently without money ; therefore, it mattered very little where his head was. They generally believed him to be a ruined man, and that was enough to satisfy the most malicious individuals ; but there was still a little curiosity about his proceedings, because it was not such a certainty after all that he might be ruined. There was some doubt on the subject among a few sceptics, and this kept Abraham from sinking altogether into obscurity.

At last the newly-married pair arrived at Norham, and made their appearance in church, and were duly stared at as if no other two people had ever been married before ; and the bride's bonnet was criticised, and the bride's gown and mantilla underwent a similar ordeal ; while she was pronounced herself to look rather badly, and as if her eyes had lost the brilliancy for which they had been remarkable—the people who said so having forgotten that they had generally denied their brilliancy at any time. The fact was that the bride did not look either very well or very happy ; but she was gracious to the old friends and enemies who came to visit her

and to satisfy their curiosity as to the kind of furniture she was mistress of ; and she made an effort to behave in a manner quite *comme il faut*—seeming to take a great interest in showing her house to her intimate friends and enemies—the latter being a good deal more numerous than the former.

Mr. Clarke, of course, went about returning visits with his wife according to the rules of early married life ; and everything seemed to go on very smoothly for a time. Sir Ralph Barnard and his daughter called upon them, and nobody mentioned the name of Mr. St. George, though all the time Sir Ralph and Miss Barnard were visiting her, Dora was thinking of the aide-de-camp who had been so intimately connected with them. She could not help thinking of them, but it was in a dreamy sort of way—something like the strain of an old air running through the brain impossible to get rid of, though disagreeable and bewildering and unwelcome.

The visits were at length all paid and returned, and then there seemed to be an end of excitement and curiosity. Dora felt glad to be quiet ; but, after a time, the quiet

seemed somewhat dreary. Ellinor came to see her often, but at last ceased her frequent visits, when she observed that Dora did not express any particular wish for her to do so, and the latter rarely passed over the solitary country road leading from the town to the old home of her childhood that she did not feel most sad, thinking of days long ago, when she did not walk to her parent's house merely as a visitor, ringing or knocking at the door, and asking Patty who was at home, but had the privilege of running in, without any preamble to the servant, and going, unceremoniously wherever she wished, without startling anybody, or causing surprise if she were seen walking upstairs, or down to the kitchen, or through the lobbies.

After a little while her husband's official duties absorbed a good deal of his time, and then came long lonely days, that filled the young wife with *ennui* inexpressible. Yet still she had her qualms of conscience concerning her state of mind; and she never, at this time, cherished a thought that was contrary to her idea of right principle. But thoughts *would* come into her mind in spite of her resolution to keep them back, and

the utmost she could do was not to encourage them when they did come.

Abraham Barr had at length succeeded in influencing the authorities to send down some officials to Norham to inquire into the state of Mr. Clarke's accounts, and to find out what grounds there were for the accusations which the upholsterer brought against him. The barrack-master was extremely surprised and annoyed at this step on the part of the authorities, and his wrath waxed greater than ever against Barr; yet still his wits were not put to flight. It was an easy matter to receive the officials with great politeness, to procure witnesses who would confound the supporters of the cabinet-maker—that gaunt, haggard man in the shabby clothes, with the hollow cheeks and sinister countenance, whose assertions could be set aside without difficulty, and laughed at by his powerful antagonist as a good jest.

So the officials sat on a certain day, and Barr gave his evidence and produced his witnesses to prove strange, fraudulent practices on the part of the ordnance storekeeper; and his face grew darker in expression than ever, when he saw that his most earnest assevera-

tions were treated lightly—sometimes with hilarity even; and that the officials, so long and anxiously expected by him as instruments to expel his enemy from the town, were disposed to treat his words with the most insulting contempt and jocularly, rather than with serious respect, the barrack-master himself sometimes joining in the laughter which occasionally burst from the lips of the men who had come to Norham, as he fondly hoped, to establish truth and justice.

Barr's witnesses were, unfortunately for him, of a low class of men, whose words, whether true or false, were not likely to be credited. They were ignorant men, too, and they could not follow any point of inquiry or explanation with the slightest consistency; and the opposite party confounded and bewildered them, till their evidence broke down completely, and Mr. Clarke triumphed.

Still the barrack-master felt that in the eyes of a great many he must suffer. Although not exactly a public investigation of his transactions as ordnance storekeeper, this inquiry was still very far from being a private one. People at Norham would know that he had been suspected of ignoble conduct—of

fraudulent practices. He was not a man who disregarded his reputation, or thought lightly of the world's opinion. Barr had become a true viper—a noxious, venomous creature, perfectly loathsome to him. How could he crush him more than he was crushed already? How could he plant his heel upon him, and flatten him to the earth, never more to rise again with power to annoy.

The result of the investigation was, that Allan Clarke was cleared of all injurious accusations, and that Abraham Barr was henceforth to be considered a low-minded, wretched, untruthful individual, of a most vindictive turn of mind. But in his own heart the upholsterer believed himself to be right, and he felt a marvellous support in that. Angry and indignant he assuredly was, but not utterly crushed in spirit.

He went home after the inquiry at the barracks was over, knowing that he had spent his money and his time in vain; knowing that he had failed miserably in his undertaking and hopes, yet inwardly supported by some strong power.

“Well, Abraham, how has it been?” asked

Mrs. Barr, as he walked into the house that night, not to be his for a much longer period.

She knew very well how it had been; the countenance of her husband told her that much; yet still she asked the question.

"It has been false, and unjust, and infamous!" exclaimed Barr; "but it won't remain that way; if I cannot have justice one way I must try for it in another."

"Give it up for ever, Abraham!" said the wife, energetically. "There is no use in trying anything more. We'll all starve unless you begin to work at once, and get what you work at sold."

"Who is to buy my work?" asked Barr, grimly.

"First do the work and then see that," said Mrs. Barr.

"There is no use in seeing or surmising," observed the upholsterer; "you know as well as I do that not a soul in Norham will buy anything from me."

"Then let us quit Norham; let us leave this neighbourhood altogether, and try for a home and a living elsewhere," suggested the wife. "This is no place for us now."

"Do you think I will leave the town where I have lived for so many years?" demanded the upholsterer, almost fiercely. "Do you think I will be the one to decamp like a coward? If I fly at all, let me have something to fly for and from. I will not be the first to run, at all events. I have still work to do here—a good deal of work. Clarke isn't done with me yet."

"What can you do more?" demanded Mrs. Barr, in a tone and with a look of anxiety. "There is nothing more to do if the authorities are satisfied that Mr. Clarke is right, and that you are wrong. What else can be done?"

"A great deal."

"In what way?"

"It does not signify at present."

"Yes, it does signify," said Mrs. Barr, a little sharply, though her voice was quivering. "It does not become the father of a family to speak so to the woman that married him, expecting him to provide for her and her children. It ain't fair for a man to neglect the trust that is committed to him, and the obligations that are imposed upon him. A father of a family isn't his own master,

Abraham. Duty is his master; and when he's given the privilege of being the head of a household he mustn't think there's nothing required of him in return. Man is born to work, and work he must, unless he can get money for doing nothing but gossiping through the town, and quarrelling with his neighbours."

"Don't aggravate me, wife!" said Barr, in a husky tone; "it will only be worse if you do."

CHAPTER VII.

A SPIRITED PONY.—A DRIVE ON THE MOOR.

ONE fine May day, when the hedges were bright and green, and the birds singing cheerily, Dora Clarke drove over to Evergreen in the little phaeton which her husband had bought for her especial use, and which she managed to drive herself, without the assistance of a servant, rather from choice than from necessity, as there were plenty of servants in the barrack-master's employment.

"I am going to drive over the moor to Speckham, and, as I don't like to go alone, you must come with me," said Dora to Ellinor.

"You have got a very restive little animal there, I think," said Ellinor.

"Oh, no; only just a little spirited," replied Dora. "I dislike so much a quiet horse; I told my husband I should not drive any animal that was not lively."

Dora scarcely ever called her husband by his Christian name in speaking of him.

"I hope he will not send us into a ditch, however," said Miss Bouverie.

"Oh, no; I am a very good whip—I shall take the greatest care of you. You will not be alarmed, I suppose, when you hear that I am going to pass Speckham, and drive home round by Glencorb?" said Dora.

"I do not like the idea of it much, certainly," replied Ellinor, who was glad, however, to see that her sister seemed in rather better spirits than usual, and therefore did not like to thwart her in her wishes respecting a drive. "But, perhaps, we can get over the ground safely."

"I am sure I can guide the pony very skilfully; the great point will be not to let the carriage go too near the edge of the precipice."

"The great point will be to get out and

walk when we come to the dangerous places," said Ellinor, smiling.

"Oh, we shall in that case have to walk for more than a mile. There is no danger at all, I assure you. We need not tire ourselves getting in and out of the carriage."

Away the little pony bounded merrily into Norham, and through the streets, till the town was passed, and the only road reached which led to the moor, where it may be remembered that Ellinor and Dora had walked one memorable stormy day with Mr. St. George—the last day that either of them had been in that direction.

When they reached the outskirts of this moor, Dora slackened the pony's pace, and seemed to grow rather thoughtful. She was thinking, in fact, of the last time she had been there.

"My husband is very good to me, Ellinor," she said, after some minutes of silence. "He gets me all I ask for. This pony is altogether for my use, and he bought it because I said I should like one. You see he also attended to my wishes about its being spirited and swift."

"I am so delighted to hear you speak so!"

said Ellinor, gladly. "It would make me happier than anything in the world—than *almost* anything—to know that you were happy and perfectly contented. If ever there was a time when I disapproved of your marriage with Allan it was because I really feared you did not know your own mind when you thought of accepting him."

"Oh, yes, I knew my mind very well," declared Dora, truthfully.

"And I trust most sincerely that you may never regret this marriage."

"At all events, you know, Ellinor, that I could not regret it as long as my husband is devoted to me as he is now. I should be most ungrateful and monstrous if I were indifferent to so much kindness. I entertained at one time very unjust and foolish opinions about Mr. Clarke's disposition and principles. You may remember how absurdly I used to judge him merely from fancy and prejudice. Yet all those ideas are now leaving my mind more and more every day."

"But you surely did not marry him still believing in the truth of those impressions?" said Ellinor.

"Oh, no, not exactly; I cannot say I

actually *believed* in them. The ideas were vague and shadowy—a sort of unaccountable, and, as it is proved, very unjust prejudice.”

“But, my dear Dora, suppose that your shadowy impressions had been made deeper, instead of being swept away altogether as time progressed, how should it have been?”

“I should have submitted to my fate,” replied Dora; “I should have believed that I deserved every punishment sent to me. As it is, I wonder I have as much peace as I have.”

“I thank God for it!” said Ellinor, earnestly.

“Yet sometimes, my sister,” continued Dora, gravely, as she forgot the reins, and let them lie loosely on the pony’s back, “sometimes I tremble for what may come in the future. I know that a great deal rests with myself—so much, that I have some haunting fears. You are not aware, perhaps, that I am not what I was at home; I am never peevish or ill-tempered now, and I never get angry, even though trifles often annoy me. My fear is, that I shall not always control my temper in this way—that I shall break away from myself, as it were, and become plunged in wretchedness.”

“But why indulge in such gloomy fears?”

If you love your husband truly, you may never feel inclined to disturb his peace or your own by quarrels or misunderstandings."

At this moment a lad firing at a passing crow on the moor frightened the pony so much, that all Dora's efforts to control his pace seemed ineffectual. He still was going in the direction she wished to drive in, but it was entirely at his own option; and if he had chosen to bound off anywhere else, she could not have prevented him.

They were now in a sort of glen, with a narrow river running deep down on one side, and rocks and a growth of underwood on the other, the road between being narrow and uneven. It was a very dangerous place for a drive under the most favourable circumstances. Here the pony fortunately slackened his pace for a few minutes; but Dora pulled the reins so tightly that he began to go backwards in a very unpleasant manner, and then refused to go forwards. It would not be possible to turn the little carriage in such a spot as it was in now, and the pony seemed to wish either to stand still or go backwards.

"I shall get out and take him by the head," said Dora, preparing to alight.

"I think *I* had better try what can be done," replied Ellinor, who saw the pony pricking up his ears in an alarming manner.

"Oh, no; you may sit still. I shall just lead him quietly forwards," said Dora.

"And I shall walk," declared Ellinor, as she got out of the carriage.

They went on for a little time, the pony suffering himself to be led onwards, while he rolled his eyes about with a cunning expression, as if he were contemplating another surprising trick to baffle his mistress. A huge white rock standing at the road-side was the next signal for a tussle with him. He started, and backed, and refused to be induced by any amount of coaxing to go forwards.

In this predicament the sisters were standing together in perplexity, when Ellinor, whose eyesight was very quick, saw two figures moving over the rocks at a little distance.

"We may get assistance soon," she said, "as I think I see people coming towards us."

"Oh! I always dislike asking for help," returned Dora. "People will laugh if they hear that I could not control my own horse."

"I do not think many persons could guide

such an animal as that," replied Ellinor. "I wonder anyone would buy such a creature for you."

"It is just exactly what I wished for," said Dora, looking a little out of temper. "I should never have felt any pleasure in driving one of your miserable, moping horses that some people delight in having. Quiet, there, Ranger. Soho, there!"

Ranger, however, was not to be coaxed in the least. He held his neck very much arched, and pawed the ground with his fore-foot, still rolling his eyes about.

Ellinor kept her eye on the approaching figures on the rocks, determined that she should beg for assistance, in spite of Dora's wish to the contrary. The latter was, of course, altogether absorbed thinking of her difficult charge, for whose behaviour she considered herself responsible.

And now the figures came bounding lightly over the rocks, so near that Ellinor could distinguish that they belonged to two well-dressed men. She would have preferred accosting persons of a lower grade than they appeared to be of; but there was no help for it now. She must seize the opportunity of

getting assistance in what seemed to her a really perilous position for pony, phaeton, sister, and self.

"Do I not know one of those people?" she thought, as the gentlemen came nearer. "Yes, certainly, it is really he! How fortunate! and he is always so polite!"

"Mr. St. George is just near, with somebody else, Dora!" she called out, gladly. "I shall run up and tell him to come to us!"

"Who did you say?" asked Dora, in a shrill strange voice.

"Mr. St. George; I cannot be mistaken, it is certainly no one else."

And, without waiting to hear Dora's almost frantic scream, entreating her not to go to him, Miss Bouverie darted off up the rocky heights in order to meet the gentlemen.

"For mercy's sake, Ellinor, come back!" cried Dora, who would have certainly preferred meeting with a serious accident to encountering her former acquaintance.

But her sister was not within hearing, nor would she have heeded the cries if she were.

She was soon face to face with Mr. St. George, flushed and weary, with her cheeks glowing brightly from the exercise she had just taken,

and her eyes shining brilliantly. The young man started, and looked surprised, when he saw her coming towards him eager and smiling.

"I am so glad that you are here, Mr. St. George," she said, rather breathlessly, as she gave him her hand, which he took, of course. "We are in such a state down there with an unmanageable pony that will neither move one way nor another; and I am so much afraid of his doing some mischief. You will come and help us, I am sure."

Mr. St. George murmured that he should be very happy, indeed, to be of use to her, and the trio moved down to where Ellinor explained that the pony carriage was standing.

All this time Dora felt in a wretched state of mind; angry with her sister, and angry with herself. Regardless of danger, she would have urged the pony onwards had it been possible to do so. Her efforts to move him only caused him to start sideways and grow more and more unmanageable; and she was, therefore, kept a prisoner by his side.

It would have taken very little more to make her leave carriage and pony to their

fate, and seek a refuge in the rushing stream below ; but she had still some lingering regard for life and safety, in spite of her overwhelming sensations of misery and perplexity.

And so she stood her ground bravely, a little defiantly, too, with flushed cheeks and flashing eyes, as Ellinor laughingly approached, accompanied by the gentlemen.

Perhaps she was scarcely sorry that Ranger now became restive again, and evinced a desire to back and plunge ; but she still held the bridle tight.

“ You had better leave him to the gentlemen,” said Ellinor, who had now grown pale again, as she saw her sister standing almost at the edge of a precipice sloping to the river.

“ Nobody shall touch the pony but myself !” exclaimed Dora, excitedly. “ I told you that I did not want assistance ; I am quite capable of managing it.”

“ Dora, I entreat you to give up your hold of the pony ; it may drag you over the precipice ; you are not strong enough to cope with it. Do let some one who understands the management of horses better than you try what can be done.”

As Miss Bouverie spoke the pony became so violently restive that human patience could hold out no longer. Seeing her to be in what seemed to him positive danger, Mr. St. George rushed forward to her assistance; but there was no time for remonstrance or conversation of any kind. For some minutes the little animal, most vicious in its nature, continued to kick and plunge in a manner that terrified Ellinor, even for the safety of Mr. St. George, who kept a firm hold of the pony, and prevented the carriage going over the precipice. Dora had been obliged to give way at last, for all her strength had forsaken her, more, however, from agitation at the sight of the person who had been summoned to her aid, than from exhaustion consequent upon her efforts to keep Ranger in bounds.

She was now very much paler than Ellinor, and all her excitement had left her.

"You had better move a little out of the way of the wheels," said Mr. St. George, addressing her for the first time, as she remained standing listlessly near the carriage. "I should be very sorry, indeed, if you were to meet with any unpleasant accident."

These words were said in a low, impressive

tone, such as the speaker knew so well how to make use of occasionally, and yet there was a touch of reproach in it too.

"I am afraid you would feel very indifferently on the subject," said Dora, as she moved away, yet the words were not without their effect upon her; they mollified her. Perhaps he did not despise her so much after all. Perhaps he was sorry for his conduct towards her.

She kept aloof on the rocks, not near her sister, and the tones of that low, musical voice were ringing in her ears. For some minutes she forgot the pony and the phaeton; but they were in skilful hands, and there was no cause to feel anxiety about them.

The only safe plan to act upon, in the present instance, was to get the little carriage moved cautiously backwards, till the narrow, dangerous road over the precipice was passed. By the united efforts of the two gentlemen this was done, and then the vehicle was turned without difficulty, Ranger having grown quite quiet when he found himself in masterly hands. Ellinor was a much better horsewoman than Dora, as she had been more accustomed to riding and driving at Halesby

than the latter ; and no doubt she would have experienced less difficulty in the management of the pony than her sister had.

When the carriage stood in readiness for the ladies, Dora moved towards it slowly, so that Ellinor had reached it before her.

"I think, as you are going to Norham, Mr. St. George, we must crave your further assistance in driving us there," said Miss Bouverie, just as her sister came up. "There is plenty of room for you and Captain Althorp in the phaeton."

"The pony seems in very good order now, Miss Bouverie," replied Mr. St. George, glancing at Dora, who made no remark.

"Oh ! it is a very treacherous little animal," said Ellinor ; "I should be afraid to trust our lives to its mercy to-day."

"Very treacherous and very pretty," observed the aide-de-camp, as he patted the pony's head. "Not a very unusual combination of qualities."

Dora heard the words, which were not without more meaning than might have seemed to indifferent listeners ; and, looking up quickly, she met the grave, reproachful look that the eyes of the speaker expressed.

"There is a great deal of treachery and cruelty in the world, certainly," she said, as her cheek flushed a little. "People soon learn to distrust fair appearances."

"And so they take warning for the future," he added, quietly."

Ellinor was determined that she should not abandon her wish of being driven home by Mr. St. George.

"I shall certainly walk home unless you come with us," she said, smiling, as she came towards him. "You must complete your work by bringing us safe at least to Norham."

"With much pleasure I shall do so, I assure you," he answered. "Will you get into the carriage?"

So Miss Bouverie got into the back seat, leaving the front part of the phaeton for her sister and Mr. St. George. Captain Althorp would have preferred walking to Norham, had it not been for Ellinor's beautiful dark eyes, which induced him to accept the place offered beside her, after Dora had been assisted into the front seat, sorely against her will. Ellinor for the first time in her life, seemed to be her sister's evil genius—bent upon placing her

in positions of torture that day; yet Dora knew it was better for her to submit quietly to what she had to undergo than to attract particular attention by displaying any symptoms of annoyance or dissatisfaction at what was unavoidable.

Mr. St. George, no doubt, felt an equal degree of embarrassment at finding himself thus thrown into such close companionship with her; yet he also had to bear his fate with composure.

Whether either of them thought of the last time they had met and spoken to each other in the leafless woods of Halesby could not be known by the other. Each could only understand his or her own reflections and reminiscences, as they sat there side by side.

Dora leaned back in the seat and closed her eyes; her companion was apparently occupied with the pony. Neither of them spoke a word as they drove across the moor where they had once walked on a stormy winter evening, beaten upon by wind and sleet, yet happy and triumphant at heart. Now the sun was shining brightly, and the gorse was blooming, and the sky above was cloudless.

There was no outward desolation apparent in the general aspect; yet the sunshine could not cheer the inner desolation of the heart, and make bright what was dark and gloomy in the mind.

When they were near Norham, Dora spoke for the first time.

"I suppose I ought to thank you for the trouble you have had with us to-day," she said; "but you know very well that we can never be friends again. There is no use in our keeping silence as to the past. For the sake of appearances we may still remain acquaintances—that is, we may speak to each other, and recognise each other when we happen to meet; but if I followed the dictates of my own heart, rather than those of common sense, I should never speak to you again."

Mr. St. George turned round as she said these words, and looked straight at her for a minute or so without speaking.

His countenance expressed wonder and doubt.

"You surprise me, Mrs. Clarke," he said at last. "You speak as if I had injured *you*, instead of being deeply injured myself. Permit me to say this in plain words."

“You know yourself whether you are speaking the truth,” replied Dora, gravely. “Your own conscience can answer and say if you have nothing to reproach yourself with towards me.”

“Explain your meaning, for I cannot comprehend it,” he said, anxiously. “I entreat you to explain it. You puzzle me so much, you make me believe that we have both wofully misunderstood each other. Can this be so, indeed?”

“On my part there was no misunderstanding, I assure you,” said Dora. “I fulfilled all that I had promised. No blame could be attached to me, except for being too confiding and simple.”

“My dear Mrs. Clarke, you speak as if I had been guilty of some very unworthy conduct!”

“I speak the truth. God only knows what you have caused me to suffer!” exclaimed Dora, passionately. “But let us talk no more; let us have no hypocrisy and evasion. I wish to forget and forgive, and to be at peace. I bear no malice or desire for revenge. I only want to say that you and I may be indifferent acquaintances in future;

something more than utter strangers to each other, yet little more."

"You are surely labouring under some great mistake," he said, scarcely knowing what he was about with the pony he was driving, and which soon understood that there was something unusual going on with the reins, which he should speedily take advantage of. "It is quite evident that some one, or something, has led you to believe that I have been acting falsely and treacherously towards you. I must have this matter cleared up, as my own character is of great consequence to me, and your opinion by no means without its weight in my estimation."

"Do not try to deceive me further," said Dora; "you know well that I have a right to feel mortified and angry. I treated you with every confidence, and you slighted me as far as was possible!"

"In what way?"

"I cannot speak more upon this subject. I can never allude to it again. It was wrong of me to do so. But accident threw us together unexpectedly, and sorely against my own will. My sister, my mother, never knew of your treatment of me. Nobody knows it

but myself; and may God pity and forgive you!"

"Pardon me, but I *must* speak further," said Mr. St. George, impressively; "it is a duty that I owe to myself to discover the drift of your words, Mrs. Clarke. You reproach me when it is I, and I only, who have reason to feel that I was treated most cruelly and most falsely! Excuse me; but there are no other words to use. What mortification have I not suffered. What days and weeks upon weeks of agony! Heaven knows this is the truth. I am guiltless of all blame; I have been true to you; and, even now, I can honestly say I forgive you."

"*You* forgive me!" exclaimed Dora, yet still not loudly. "*You* speak of injury and treachery on my part!"

"You said that you fulfilled all that you had promised, but surely you must forget what you promised, and the contract you made with me upon the day we parted at Halesby?"

"I forget nothing, though it is my earnest prayer to forget the past altogether. I am wrong to speak to you, or to permit you to speak to me any further. Let us cease this

talking, which can be of no benefit to either of us. I am very happy as I am now—the wife of a man who truly loves me, and who has been faithfully devoted to me when I did not deserve it—a man worth dozens of the frivolous, idle, flattering creatures, who attract the fancy of foolish young girls fresh from the nursery or from school! I am better off than I deserve to be, far better, and I am very thankful.”

The deep sigh that followed these words did not seem as if the words were very sincere.

“A lady has always the best of an argument with a man, of course,” said Mr. St. George, “as she cannot well be flatly contradicted or called to account for her assertions; but she should be just, and allow her antagonist to say something in his defence.”

“But suppose he can say *nothing* in his defence he had better keep silent.”

“But suppose he can say a great deal? Suppose, in fact, that he is accused altogether in the wrong—that there is not the shadow of a shade of blame attached to him? Suppose he is solely the injured, suffering being—is he not to open his lips to refute unjust

accusations, and to exonerate himself from what may probably be laid to his charge by falsehood and slander?"

"There was no slander or falsehood—nobody said a word against you; I never heard an injurious report of you from any creature. I judged you entirely from your conduct towards myself—your cruel rejection of my most earnest appeal; your suddenly leaving Halesby and the neighbourhood of Norham in a most unexpected manner; and your neglect of all that I had asked, and all that you had promised!"

"Why should my quitting Halesby have caused you to doubt me, and judge me harshly?"

"Because I now consider that you left the Park to rid yourself of me and of all that had been agreed upon between us. I am convinced that you were deceiving me all through, solely for the sake of gratifying your vanity. You could have no other meaning in pouring flattery and nonsense into my ears from day to day! I hope you are not beguiling some simple girl with similar arts at present. But, thank goodness, I soon understood you in your true colours, and my suffer-

ings were very shortlived ! I could scarcely say I suffered at all."

Dora forgot what she had said a few minutes before respecting her mortification and sufferings; she bungled in her assertions as those do who are not speaking the truth. But her companion was not collected enough at present to take notice of her contradictory speeches. He was agitated and discomposed; he believed firmly that Dora was not saying voluntarily what was false at present merely to excuse her conduct towards him; he felt convinced that something had occurred to make her doubt and think ill of him; and that, under the impression that he was treacherous and unworthy, she had changed her mind with regard to him, and so given him up for a suitor of more sterling qualities.

"As you will not permit me to talk any more to you here, Mrs. Clarke," he said, at last, "I must only adopt some other time for an explanation of my own conduct and feelings. I agree that this is no place for a conversation such as we have been holding; so, for the present, we may keep silent upon the subject that we have been discussing."

"For the present and for *ever* !" said Dora,

emphatically. "As a married woman, I must never hear a word on the subject again. I have given up the follies and frivolities of my girlish days, and I only alluded to the past to let you know that I should be willing to meet you henceforth as an acquaintance, though we can never be friends again."

"Be it so, then," returned the young man, reining in the pony, which had started into a long-contemplated gallop. "Nevertheless, Mrs. Clarke, I must beg to have my own way in this instance. I shall send you a written explanation of all that I have done and felt; we need not *speak* again on the subject. In that I shall obey you fully."

CHAPTER VIII.

HUSBAND AND WIFE.

NORHAM was soon reached, and then there could be no more speaking between the two people sitting in the front of the little phaeton.

"We shall not ask you to come any farther with us, Mr. St. George," said Ellinor, as the party reached the town. "I am sure Ranger will behave properly for the rest of the way."

"Yes, I think he will," replied Mr. St. George, who did not wish to give Dora an opportunity of forbidding him to write to her,

and was consequently glad to talk to her sister, and glad to be permitted to escape going on to Evergreen.

"You will accept our very best thanks," said Miss Bouverie, shaking his hand warmly.

Dora gave her hand to him also, but without speaking, and thus they parted, both feeling pretty firmly convinced that they had reason to feel distrustful and injured.

"How very kind Mr. St. George was to drive us so willingly all that way!" said Ellinor, when her sister had once again resumed the guidance of the pony, and they were driving on the road to Evergreen.

"I do not think he could well have refused to drive us, after being asked to do so," replied Dora; "and, after all, he did not seem to know how to manage Ranger better than I could myself. Several times he was on the point of letting him run off."

"Yes, but he did not let him. He brought us to Norham with uninjured necks and limbs.

"I could have done so just as well, only you were so impatient, and in such a state of excitement."

"Were you and Mr. St. George fighting all the way to Norham?" asked Ellinor, smiling.

"No. Why?"

"Because I thought I heard tones that sounded like differences of opinion. You will never forgive him, I fear."

"Forgive what, Ellinor?" asked Dora, turning quickly to her sister, with a disturbed look on her countenance.

"Forgive the serious wrong he did you."

"What did you hear, Ellinor? You have been listening unfairly to what I said to him," said Dora, who was thrown off her guard.

"Oh, you know I could not shut my ears, or grow suddenly deaf," declared Ellinor, whose eyes were sparkling with a little amusement—a rare thing with her.

"Yes, it was wrong of him to talk so," continued Dora, musingly; "but tell me, Ellinor, truly what you mean—what you think I meant, or that he meant."

"You meant to scold him for taking the guardianship of the pony, I suppose," replied Ellinor, who felt just then a little puzzled at the anxious, distressed countenance of her sister, which she recalled to her memory in

after days, when the cause seemed clearer to her than it did now.

“Oh, you only mean that?” said Dora.

“Yes, my dear; what did you think I meant?”

“I could not tell. I thought, perhaps, that—however, it does not signify. I feel quite confused. I am sure I look very wild and strange?”

“No, nothing particular; you have been agitated and unnerved, no doubt, by the adventures of the day,” replied Ellinor, who thought her sister did look a good deal upset and worried, even more so than the occasion required. Her own fears had left no trace, and she had nearly ceased to think of Ranger’s misdemeanours.

“You will stay and dine with us, Dora?” she said, as they were near Evergreen.

“No, Ellinor; not to-day. You know I am not my own mistress now. The time is gone by when I could dine with my own family without having to explain to somebody else what I meant by doing so.”

“Oh! I forgot that you must be at your own home,” said Ellinor, who regretted having broached the subject, and was sorry to

hear her sister speak as she had just spoken, and sigh as she had just sighed.

They parted at the gate of Evergreen, and then Dora drove back to Norham, feeling out of spirits and out of temper, with a general idea running through her mind that life was very dreary and very sad, and the world a very wicked place, abounding in treachery, deceit, and unworthiness of all kinds.

Dinner at her new home was always very late, as her husband was generally busy till an advanced hour of the day, and could not return to the house early. So she had a lonely time to wait in solitude before he joined her, sitting in the large drawing-room of the large house that she was the nominal mistress of—the house that she had never taken any pride in—which, in fact, she scarcely considered her own at all, being pretty right in this conjecture, though she did not know the legal status of a wife, nor how little the law actually allows her to possess of anything in the world.

“Am I not like a dark spirit of evil, sitting here?” she thought, as she leaned her head on her hand, and gazed out upon the garden which the drawing-room overlooked—“a curse instead of a blessing to anybody?”

I am not happy myself, and I can give no happiness to others."

It was a lovely evening, bright and cheerful, and the birds were twittering and singing among the garden bushes. A very orderly garden it was, for the barrack-master was the most orderly of men, with an eye to much neatness and precision in all his arrangements. His appreciation of the useful did not make him dead to the beautiful, and his flowers were rare and exquisite, cultivated for the most part by his own instructions. Evening sunlight was playing on the leaves of the trees, and on the bright masses of early tulips and hyacinths beneath her at that moment, but she noticed them not. In her own heart there was desolation and darkness, and she could take in no reflection of outward cheerfulness.

When the dinner hour arrived, and her husband appeared with his usual punctuality, she went to meet him with a semblance of gladness and welcome—not from deceit, but from a feeling of commiseration and duty. She knew that, having married her, he had debarred himself from marrying anyone else as long as she lived, and that if she did not

try to make his home happy she would be acting a very unfair part indeed. She stood in the way of his ever trying for a more congenial life partner, and, therefore, her conscience and her reason told her she must not let him know what a woful imposition she was.

Upon this evening she thought him looking rather anxious and careworn, an unusual thing for him.

"You have been fatiguing yourself," she said, as he came into the drawing-room.

"Oh, no; I am never fatigued."

"Well, something has worried you, I am sure. I hope that wretched man, Abraham Barr, is not going on with any more of his malicious inventions?"

"I have no doubt that he is," replied Mr. Clarke. "The fellow will be hanged yet."

"What trouble he gives you; and yet I always thought the Barrs very respectable people. Lucy Barr seemed such a nice girl."

"But Lucy has nothing to do with her father, though I dare say, she is a deceitful creature, like the generality of her sex."

"You think women more deceitful than men?" said Dora, sighing.

"Of course I do. Everyone does. They are more sly and full of duplicity than men."

"I don't believe much of that. I think you are a very deceitful set of beings."

"But nothing like your sex."

"You are very polite. But what about your great politicians and diplomats, and all your war stratagems and your wily burglars that we read of?"

"Oh, they are chiefly great affairs—there is nothing petty or mean about State diplomacy or warlike stratagems. You know all is fair in love and war."

"I don't know much about war, but I do not think anything underhand is fair in love. I should despise the being who acted an unfair, dishonourable part for any cause whatever."

"I did not think you were so very strict and severe, my dear."

"You do not know what I am yet; I am a terrible creature sometimes, when roused up."

"I hope you will never be roused up, then."

"I hope not, sincerely. You know I told

you that I was not a good person ; so you can hardly blame me if I turn out wicked, as I gave you warning in time."

" But if a man gives warning that he is going to murder another, the warning would not exonerate him from blame if he really commits the murder."

" The cases are not alike in the least. You chose to marry me in spite of all the faults I told you of, and so I consider I have a right to my faults, now."

" But I have not seen any of your faults. I am perfectly satisfied with you."

" I do not deserve you to say so, but it is very kind of you to take the trouble of flattering me now in our hum-drum married state. I wonder when you will grow like papa, who never makes a civil or polite speech to poor mamma. You know I always had a horror of married life from what I witnessed at home. I used to think people were mad to believe there was any happiness in matrimony."

" But you have changed your opinion now, I trust."

" I cannot say yet," replied Dora, evasively.

"So far you are very good, and I thank you much."

The dinner was announced now, and the husband and wife sat down to table in a Darby-and-Joan-like manner, all alone, with only one servant in attendance.

"You had a pleasant drive to-day, I trust, dear?" said Mr. Clarke.

"Yes—no—not very pleasant. Ranger is rather too spirited and obstinate, and he wanted to run away several times, and to stand still several other times."

"Indeed! How dreadful, and you all alone!"

"Ellinor came with me," said Dora, blushing.

"But is she capable of managing a restive pony?"

"No, not any more capable than I am myself," replied Dora, in a husky, agitated voice, for to her surprise she found herself growing suddenly quite unnerved and faint.

"And what did you do with Ranger?"

"Ellinor got assistance," said Dora, trying to be firm and unconcerned, yet knowing that she must reveal the fact of Mr. St. George having driven her to Norham, as her

husband would hear of it in some other quarter, and wonder, perhaps, at her concealment of the fact.

In reality there was nothing at all extraordinary in Ellinor having asked the only gentleman she met with whom she was acquainted to drive her and her sister in safety to Norham, when they were in danger and difficulty; but still Dora dreaded betraying the agitation she experienced in mentioning the name of Mr. St. George; and the more she hesitated to mention it the more unnerved she felt, and the less able she was to maintain an indifferent manner on the subject.

"Oh, you found some man, I suppose, who set you all right?" said her husband. "It is a very lonely road in general towards Glencorb. You know I told you it was a dangerous place too, if you recollect, dear."

"We happened to see Mr. St. George passing near us, with somebody whose name I forget," said Dora, who could scarcely see any object straight before her, from the mist that was gathering over her sight, "and he drove us to Norham—that is Ellinor asked him."

"St. George! Yes, I believe he returned to Norham a day or two ago," observed

Clarke, looking steadily at his wife, who was as pale as she could be, looking very like the way she looked a few weeks ago, when Mr. St. George appeared to her in Hyde Park.

It was a curious coincidence that she should seem so agitated and faint twice with reference to Sir Ralph Barnard's aide-de-camp, if she were indifferent to him. The barrack-master felt very doubtful and perplexed on the subject. Was a blight to come upon all his happiness yet—the blight of knowing that his wife could never love him? Could he blame her greatly if she did not love him? Did his reason or his conscience tell him that it would be very strange if she had never given him her whole heart's affection?

It is difficult to say how he felt towards her at this time, as he watched her with a keen scrutiny. He was not a man much given to pity or sympathy with suffering. Had his wife been suffering from any other cause than one which was only likely to inspire him with the most bitter pangs of jealousy and disappointment, he would assuredly have been distressed upon her account; but in the present instance it is to be feared that all his concern was for himself.

There was a long silence in the dining-room, and as the dessert was now upon the table, the servant had retired from the apartment.

Dora was leaning back in her chair, quite unable to keep up any longer.

"I feel so very ill that I am afraid I must leave you," she said; "the air seems so close here."

"It ought not to be close," said her husband, a little coldly, "the room being extremely large."

"Well, I don't know what the reason may be, but I am quite unable to remain here," she replied, feeling rather disappointed at the manner in which he had just answered her.

"Are you quite certain that you do not know the reason?" he asked, fixing his eyes, which had assumed their hardest, most cruel expression, on her face.

"Quite certain," answered Dora, truthfully, for indeed she could not comprehend her own agitation. She could not have explained the cause of it, for in her heart she believed herself to be perfectly free from any lingering trace of regard for the person whom she had once considered her lover.

"And you are very strict and severe as to the veracity and honour of others?" continued her husband.

"What do you mean?" she asked, a little indignantly. "You talk so unkindly."

"I am surprised that you are not more consistent in your regard for truth and honourable conduct."

"I cannot understand you in the least. What has my feeling ill to do with truth or honour?"

"It has this to do with it—you said some time ago that you would despise a person who acted in a dishonourable way for any cause whatever. Did you not?"

"Yes, and I adhere most strictly to that."

"Well, a falsehood is dishonourable. Is it not?"

"Yes, decidedly."

"Then permit me to say that I consider you have been guilty of one yourself just a moment or two ago."

"Not to my own knowledge, then. What was it?"

"You said you did not know the reason of your agitation. You said that you were 'quite certain' that you did not know it, and yet I

am fully persuaded that you know it as well as I do."

Her husband's words were nearly as reviving to Dora as some pungent remedy for faintness. In a moment her cheek was flushed, and her eyes bright.

"How cruelly you speak! You have no pity!" she exclaimed, hastily. "I should not have been treated this way in my own home."

"Then you do not consider this house your home, I suppose? You know very well that by your own account, 'your home,' as I presume you call Evergreen Villa, was not a happy one, and that you could not expect much attention there from anyone."

"Yes, from my sister, the best of human beings, I could always look for kindness and sympathy—such kindness as I shall never get from anyone else in the whole world."

As soon as the words were spoken, Dora regretted them, for she knew she had received great kindness from her husband since her marriage.

"It is a pity, perhaps, that you ever left your home," said the barrack-master, coldly.

"Oh, yes; a sad thing, perhaps, for more

than myself alone," returned Dora, pressing her hand on her forehead. At that moment a prayer rose within her heart—a prayer that God would have mercy upon her, and give her patience, so that she might keep silent under all treatment—silent from words that might wound or aggravate her husband. Was it too late to pray now? Had she already said too much? Had she doomed herself to the life of misery she had so long dreaded?

"Why should we quarrel?" she said, after having communed with her own heart for a few minutes.

"You know that yourself better than I do," he answered significantly.

"Indeed I do not. I wish to have peace, and to make you happy if I possibly can. It is my earnest prayer to do right, and to prevent you ever feeling a regret that you chose me for your wife."

"I never thought that you were much addicted to prayer," he replied with a very palpable sneer. "If you had been one of the pious order of young ladies I should never have thought of you; they are such ineffable bores."

"If you think in that way you cannot be

surprised at meeting with misery and misfortune," said the young wife.

"Are you perfectly free from all cant and hypocrisy, Dora?" he asked; "are you sincere in anything?"

"I see that you wish to provoke me to anger, but I will not be roused. For God's sake do not excite or irritate me. You do not know how I feel—how very wretched! As you hope for any peace or comfort, say no more. I feel that you doubt and distrust me, and I am only sorry that you did not fix your choice upon one of the good, steady, pious women whom you speak so slightly of. One of them would never make you unhappy, as I may, and perhaps as I have done already."

"If any ill luck had driven me to marry a fanatical, methodistical spouse, I should have flown to the Antipodes before the honeymoon was over. I am not going to be preached to, I assure you."

"You cannot expect me to respect you if you speak in that way."

"The question is, whether you would respect me or care three straws about me, whether I spoke in that way or any other way. You

must have known long ago that I was not a religious individual, and I can only look upon you as a charming hypocrite if you go on condemning my views at this time of day, especially because I happen to have made an unpleasant discovery concerning some of your own affairs. I am not aware whether your present views are quite orthodox."

"Then you will not forgive and forget?" she said, meeting his hard, cruel eyes with a look of softness that he distrusted and abhorred, though it was the sincere expression of her heart's best thoughts.

"You do not care whether I do so or not. If you really valued my opinion, Dora, you would never be so mild about it. You would have flown into a fury long before this."

"You do not understand me at all. Heaven grant that I may never fly into what you call a fury," she said, sadly. "After once doing so, I should be worth very little to you."

"I will give you leave to fly into one whenever you like. I should rather enjoy it."

"You treat me as if I were a child or a

simpleton," she said, still keeping down her temper by a strong effort—such an effort as people of her disposition can only understand. "You should not forget that, though I am younger than you are, I am still to be treated as if I had the usual amount of sense granted to the generality of human beings."

"I consider that you are quite as sensible now as you will ever be. Women never get any wiser by growing old; they rather deteriorate in every way with the advance of years."

Dora sighed, and said no more; and in a short time after she had spoken, the servant entered, bearing a single letter on a tray.

The barrack-master looked at it as the servant approached the table.

"It is for Mrs. Clarke, sir," said the man.

"And to Mrs. Clarke let it be handed," observed the master, who had seen the address on the envelope, and noticed the handwriting of it with some suspicion and distrust.

Dora took the letter, and received a shock as she looked at it, though it bore no ominous seal of black, nor no mourning border likely to awaken fears of the death of dear relatives.

It was the handwriting that caused her heart to cease its regular beating, and a chill to run through her frame. In her agitated state of mind, this new shock was severely felt.

"Who is your correspondent, Dora?" asked the barrack-master, who was still sitting opposite to her at the table. "Rather a good hand that, as well as I could see."

"This letter is for my own private perusal," said Dora desperately.

"You told me once in our courting days that you never wrote any letters, and never received any."

"I write very few, and I am sure I receive very few. You cannot say I told an untruth there."

"Then I am doubly curious to know who your present correspondent is."

"I shall not gratify you, then—that is all," said Dora. "I am not going to read the letter at present; I am not able to do so."

"I will read it for you—hand it over to me."

"No, thanks. I always like to read my own letters."

"Especially such a letter as that, I presume."

"Yes, such a letter as that, as well as any other."

"But you know that a husband has a right to read his wife's letters now and then."

"I do not believe it. He may do so if he is dishonourable; but he has no right on the subject."

Dora did not understand that, by the fair and equitable state of the British law at present, a letter, though directed to her, could not belong to her, any more than the clothes or jewellery she wore belonged to her, now that she was a married woman.

"Excuse me. A husband has a great many rights and privileges that you can only understand by-and-bye, perhaps," said Clarke.

"I never care about your letters, or who writes to you; yet you get letters by the score."

"That is precisely the reason you do not care. It is because you rarely get anything but a tiny note from 'your own home' that I am all curiosity to learn the name of your extraordinary correspondent in the present instance."

"But the letter is not for you. I do not know what is in it. Perhaps I shall never

read a word of it myself. I have no curiosity on the subject."

"Without doubt, you know perfectly well who the writer is, without having to wait to open the missive. Do let me look at that handsome crest on the envelope."

"I never like my letters to be paraded about before I read them," said Dora, who had to dissemble a little here. "Besides, I am going upstairs."

"The dining-room is very close again, is it not? If you go to the drawing-room, so shall I."

"But I am going to my own room. I am really quite ill; I must have a little rest." And she rose from the table. He rose too.

"Dora, who is that letter from?" he asked, gravely, as she was standing up."

"I cannot tell you."

"But you know yourself?"

"Yes, I think I know."

"Then you *must* tell me."

"Do not ask me. It is not of any consequence to either you or me; yet I will not tell you, and I wish you would not ask me."

She spoke firmly, but her face was nearly ghastly, and she had laid her hands on the

table to support herself. The letter was in her pocket.

"I desire you to tell me who that letter is from. Whatever you may say, I believe it to be of the utmost consequence, both to yourself and me. I believe that anyone in my position would be justified in seeing and reading such a letter as that. I insist upon your giving it to me."

"And I refuse," she said, still keeping down all appearance of anger or excitement. Perhaps she had not strength for either. "I must refuse such a request, for I think it unkind and unfair. I think you are unjust to me, and that you have no right in the world to make such an unreasonable demand. You treat me, indeed, like a child, as I said before."

"You require far more surveillance than a child, I should say," he observed, bitterly. "What you do as regards yourself may be of little consequence, but remember that it is not alone yourself that will suffer by any folly or imprudence on your part; remember that *my* honour and respectability will be called in question by whatever absurdity or treachery

you choose to practise now, since you are my wife, and bear my name."

"You will be sorry for this yet," said Dora, in a voice scarcely audible. "You will never cease to wrong and taunt me till I shall be led away from all my good resolutions. You do not know how I have tried to do well for the last few months."

"Then you have found the effort extremely difficult. Thank you. But that has nothing to do with the letter in your pocket. I think I know pretty well who the writer is by this time, and if you have any regard for him you had better send that epistle back unopened, or let me do it for you. I do not want bloodshed any more than most people, I suppose; but in a case like this, a bullet or two settles a difficulty better than anything else, though it is a sort of a remedy not so much in fashion now as in former days."

"There will be no necessity for murder of any kind about me or my letter," said Dora, "unless, indeed, I am the victim myself, for I feel as if I could not live through many scenes like this. But the sooner you get rid of me the better it will be for you, perhaps.

I thought you really loved me, but I do not think it now. I was most grateful to you, but I am afraid I can owe you gratitude no longer."

"Grateful! gratitude!" exclaimed the husband, scornfully. "Such words for a wife to use! Why did you marry me at all? Why did you accept my proposal, when all you could give me in return for the most devoted love was *gratitude*?"

"I never deceived you for an instant. I never professed great affection for you; yet I felt more for you up to this moment than I ever thought I should. I believe I could have returned your love more and more the longer we both lived, if you had only continued to treat me as you have treated me up to this time. Even still, if you will say you are sorry for doubting and insulting me, I shall forget all that has passed this evening, and never allude to it again."

As Dora spoke she thought of her father and mother, and, above all, of her sister; she thought of those three people, who would grieve so if she were to say that she could not live under her husband's roof; and she thought of her husband, too, and of the respon-

sibility she had taken upon herself when she agreed to be his wife as long as they both should live. The instinct to do what was just and right was strong within her heart; but she was standing on a very tottering foundation, of which principle formed but a slight part.

CHAPTER IX.

DORA READS HER LETTER.

ALLAN CLARKE was not a man to say he was sorry for doubting or insulting anyone whom he considered to be in his power, or dependent upon him. An acute man he was, yet still not sufficiently gifted with penetration to understand the character and disposition of his wife. Perhaps he did not choose to take the trouble of trying to understand it. It was in his nature to be distrustful and suspicious of people generally, and to believe that there was little of truth or sincerity in the world. He was not softened by Dora's

last words, because he felt doubtful of the spirit in which they were uttered. He was wrathful, and disappointed, and jealous; he felt nearly certain that his wife had not told the whole truth concerning the day's events, and the manner in which she and Rodney St. George had met that afternoon. The fact of her having met him at all was enough to embitter and annoy him. He did not like her humility and her sudden subsidence from excitement to calmness. He believed her to be hypocritical and artful, endeavouring, probably, to throw him off his guard by an affectation of patience and forgiveness.

"I have said nothing to insult you," he observed, coldly. "I cannot say that I regret anything I have told you. Whatever I may have said, I believed it my duty to say, and I adhere to it all. You have no trust or confidence in me. My opinion of you has changed very much within the last half hour. I was utterly deceived up to that time, but my eyes are opened now."

"I scarcely comprehend what you mean," replied Dora, "yet it appears to me that you are unreasonable and unjust."

"You know very well what I mean, and

also what you mean yourself. You are very cunning and very obstinate, but I shall take measures to prevent your over-reaching or deceiving me in future. I have a great responsibility, and I cannot neglect it."

"Then you do not consider that I am able to take care of myself?"

"No, certainly not; I have every reason to believe the contrary."

"And you do not feel any regret for having made me most unhappy and wretched?"

"I do not believe that I have made you so. I daresay your conscience may smite you a little, and you may feel annoyed that I have detected you, but otherwise I do not think you will take anything I have said much to heart."

"I am sorry, indeed, that you should have spoken to me as you have done," said Dora, as she made a movement to leave the room, "and I am sure that you will regret it yourself also. There was not the slightest reason for this altercation."

"How can you say so when you know that you have just received a letter which you would not permit me to read, or even tell me who it was written by? Does that look like

confidence in me? does it look like respect for me? does it look like the fulfilment of your duty as a wife?"

"A wife is not obliged or expected to tell the affairs of others to her husband when they are only confided to herself," replied Dora. "I should never consider that I was bound to tell you anything that concerned my sister, for instance, if she chose to impart any secret to me."

"Your sister!" repeated the husband, sneeringly. "I shall never ask you to tell me your sister's secrets, I assure you; but the letter you have just received is from a very different person from your sister. I am by no means an inquisitive individual, or addicted to prying into the private affairs of families, but I must confess that I feel a little curious to know what men my wife may choose to get letters from, and what the letters are about."

"You may make your mind easy about this letter," said Dora, "for it is, no doubt, the last of the kind either you or I will be troubled with; yet still it would not be right for me to let anyone except myself read it. I always look upon letters as sacred things,

never to be read or interfered with except by the writers and by those to whom they are addressed, unless by the permission of those to whom they rightly belong."

"Yes; but as you are the person in this instance to whom that letter belongs, you are at liberty, according to your^{own} views, to give me permission to read it."

"Not before I have done so myself."

"And certainly I do not expect to get permission afterwards. I could *oblige* you to give it up to me if I liked, but I do not choose to annoy myself further about the matter. Probably I shall have to take measures in some other quarter to prevent a repetition of this intolerable impertinence. No man can dare to interfere with me or mine except at his peril!"

Dora was yet but a short time married, and already she had undergone this unpleasant, humiliating scene—such a scene as might be repeated under other circumstances many times perhaps in a year—oftener and oftener as time should wear on. It was a very dark look-out, and then came the unhappy feeling of being like a prisoner in chains of iron,

bound down for ever in bonds that might never become tolerable.

"I worked out my own destiny," she thought, as she went towards the door of the dining-room; "there is no one to blame but myself. Whatever punishment I receive, I suppose it is all deserved!"

And so she passed out of the apartment, scarcely having strength to turn the door-latch. Upon reaching her own room, she waited a long time before venturing to take the letter which had caused so much unpleasant conversation from her pocket; but finally she drew it forth, and, with a movement something like an effort of desperation, she tore it open.

It contained these words:—

"As I am still under the impression that some one or some thing has made you think ill of me, I cannot refrain from writing this letter to exonerate myself from any false charges that may have been made against me.

"The words which you spoke to me this day leave the impression on my mind that

you regarded, and still continue to regard me, as extremely culpable for some unexplained cause ; while I can affirm positively that it is I who have every reason to consider myself as wronged and slighted by yourself. I know that this is a letter I scarcely ought to address to you now, when you are the wife of another man ; yet I should remain for ever, perhaps, as stigmatised in your mind as having acted a base, dishonourable part, if I did not venture to enter into some explanations.

“ As to explanations from you, I do not ask them. You had a right, I suppose, to dispose of yourself as you thought proper—especially if you believed that I had played a false or underhand part ; yet I must, in justice to myself, say that your conduct towards me appeared inexplicable and scarcely excuseable at a time when I considered that I had been guilty of no offence—no infringement of the contract that we had both entered into before our parting at Halesby.

“ Need I recall to your memory the substance of our agreement upon that day which is still so fresh in my recollection ? No doubt you remember that you required a promise of

me which I kept faithfully. That promise was, that I should not write to you after our separation till you had written in the first instance to me. You told me that you were not your own mistress, and could not control your own actions at that time, but that in a short while afterwards you would be at liberty to write to me a full explanation of what you could do, and whether you could accept the proposal which I had made to you—nearly as plainly as it was possible for me to do so—but which you did not think proper to answer decisively at that time.”

“After going to Ireland, where I had been called suddenly by a letter from my mother, I waited vainly for any communication from you. Daily I expected to receive a letter from you, and daily I was disappointed. My mother’s health at length required a removal from home, and I accompanied her to Italy, leaving directions, of course, for any letters forwarded to me to Gartoquil to be sent abroad to my address there. Many letters reached me; there was no mistake about any that had been forwarded. The length of time that had elapsed without my receiving any communication from you, from the time

I had gone to Ireland and then to Italy, prevented my hoping that you would write at all after I left Gartoquil. I grew despairing, and was often on the point of breaking my promise and writing to ask what you meant to do, and why you were keeping me so cruelly in torture and suspense !”

“ Oh, if he had !” thought Dora, as she laid the letter down, and ceased to read. “ Oh, if he had done so, what a difference it would have made to me ! But how am I to believe all this ? Where did the letter I wrote to him go to ? Letters are very seldom lost in the post, and why should that one, above all others—that one so all-important to my happiness—have gone astray ? I am afraid he does not write the whole truth ; it is impossible that a letter so plainly directed, and with my address clearly written inside of it, could have been lost, and never heard of from that time to this !”

And then other surmises crossed her mind. Could his family have intercepted the letter in any way ? Such practices had been heard of before ; yet how could any member of his family know her letter from any other ?

Unless they made a practice of opening all his letters, and acting a very dishonourable part, indeed, they could scarcely know what particular communication to keep back from him. Whatever view she took of the subject she felt perplexed and bewildered.

After some time she resumed the perusal of Mr. St. George's letter:—

“Yet I would not do so. I would not give you any reason to believe that I was regardless in the smallest degree of your wishes and injunctions. I feared that if I broke my word and wrote, you would consider me as unworthy of your confidence. I determined to suffer on for a longer period in misery and wretchedness, scarcely having a spark of hope, yet not willing to believe that you were determined to cast me off utterly, without taking the trouble to give me any notice of your intentions. Judge of my astonishment when, after a long, long time of doubt and despair, I heard of your marriage with Mr. Clarke!

“Pardon me when I say that there had been people who tried often to make me believe that you were not to be depended

upon in the matter of love or courtship—that you were a coquette, and prone to break hearts without much compunction. I never believed this account of you till your own conduct seemed to confirm the report. I considered then that you had made me one of your many victims, and that, although actually engaged to marry another man, you were trifling with my affections, merely for the gratification of a cruel vanity.”

“Just what I thought of him!” said Dora to herself, as she ceased reading again for a few minutes. “How very strange all this is; how incredible!” and then she took up the letter again:—

“You cannot be surprised if I felt most indignant at your conduct, which had caused me such intense suffering. When the first agony of disappointment was over, I began to entertain very severe thoughts of you indeed. I could not pretend to be indifferent on the subject. I felt that my hopes were blighted, my happiness destroyed, my life made miserable. If I judged you wrongly, you must forgive me; but your own sense

must tell you that appearances were altogether against you. Did it not seem as if I were justified in condemning you? Whatever your reasons for giving me up may have been, surely I had a right to expect some warning of your intentions—some explanation of your conduct. I felt very badly used, and even still I cannot comprehend how you can justify your treatment of me; yet you speak as if I were all in fault and to blame, as if I were the culprit to stand accused of every treachery and deceit—I, who was heart and soul devoted to you, and most anxious to attend to all your wishes.

“I can say no more, except that I trust, you will believe that what I have written was written in all truth and sincerity.

“RODNEY ST. GEORGE.”

And thus the letter ended. When Dora had finished reading it, she began to think it bore the stamp of truth. Her reason told her that if the writer had really played a false part towards her, he would scarcely have taken the trouble to excuse his conduct at all. It was not likely that a gentleman, merely for the purpose of representing himself in a fa-

vourable light to a person who could be of no consequence to him, would write a deliberate falsehood, and deny receiving a letter which he really had received, when there was no necessity to touch upon the subject at all.

"The fates have surely been against me," she thought, as she let the letter drop from her hand. "If it is indeed true that he did not get my letter, I must only consider myself the most unfortunate of beings! But it is too late to repine or murmur now. I must only have patience, and pray that I shall be able to bear my destiny."

After some deliberation, and debating in her own mind, she thought it best to write an answer to the letter she had just read, and consequently she dispatched the following note to Mr. St. George:—

"I have received your letter, and read it, and I cannot doubt the truth of what you have told me in it; for it would be difficult to understand what the aim could be of writing falsehoods to exonerate yourself in the eyes of a person who can never be anything to you now. As I also have a character to maintain, I must in justice to myself say that

I fulfilled my part of our agreement at Halesby, and sent a letter to you, explaining what my intentions were, most fully and clearly. It never entered my head to trifle with your affections or to treat you negligently. I had the deepest regard for you, and wished to act in every way towards you with sincerity. It is of no consequence now what the contents of the letter which I sent to Ireland to you were. However, it may have been, you did not receive it, and in this misfortune we have both suffered. Yet I am glad to think that the letter was lost, rather than that it reached you safely, and that you neglected to answer it, as I entreated you to let me have a reply as early as possible. Waiting, as I did wait, vainly for an answer from you for days and weeks, it never occurred to me to write to you again and ask why you did not send me a reply, because I was mortified beyond measure by your apparent negligence, and I did not dream that my letter, which was directed very clearly, could have gone astray. Heaven knows what became of it, or where it may be. Yet it is a rare thing for letters to miscarry in the post, I think, and you could not have

left Gartoquil for Italy at the time I wrote to you.

“ Under these circumstances, I regret very much any severe remarks I may have made to you while labouring under the impression that you had treated me with disrespect and indifference. More I cannot say, beyond a hope that you will forgive me and remain my friend. There is no use in alluding to the past now. It must be buried in oblivion. I am not an expert letter-writer, and I never was very romantic or sentimental; but I trust I have expressed myself in terms that you can understand.

“ Yours truly,

“ DORA CLARKE.”

Dora smiled bitterly when she thought what a difference there was between the letter that she had now finished writing and directing, and the one that she had dispatched to the same person a few months ago. She had a severe trial to bear, yet still in one way she felt relief. There was no reason for her to feel mortification any longer. She had not been slighted or treated shamefully by the person she had trusted and confided in. All

the humiliation she had suffered so bitterly was without cause. She felt that she could look back upon the past without shrinking any longer. But she had a severe trial to bear, and she knew that she ought not to indulge in grief or repining; she had a sufficient sense of duty to be aware that what she should do was to try to banish all remembrance of a misfortune that could not be remedied now.

In the gathering darkness of the evening this unhappy young woman sat, plunged in the depths of sorrow, yet persuading herself that she was not really grieving. The bitterest thought she had was that she herself had caused nearly all her own wretchedness. When the hour arrived that she usually presided at the tea table of her new home, she endeavoured to go down to the drawing-room, and preserve a calm demeanour; but her husband was not there. He had gone out of the house soon after she had left the dining-room, and did not return till a very late hour.

CHAPTER X.

MISS BOUVERIE HEARS UNPLEASANT NEWS.

FROM that time forth the barrack-master felt suspicious and distrustful of his wife, and ill at ease in his mind. Abraham Barr continued to annoy him. As a last resource, the upholsterer had written to the member for Northam, hoping to interest him on the subject of Mr. Clarke's nefarious practices, and to have allusion made to them in the House of Commons.

The member wrote a civil reply to Barr's letter, but it was vague, and not likely to give much hope; yet it pleased Abraham, and

he still had a dim vision of some great disgrace and punishment for his enemy. Who could tell what might happen, even in a short time, to the barrack-master? Who, indeed?

Now, Mr. Clarke had a great many annoyances and perplexities just at this time, and letters were coming to him that did not add to his peace of mind from day to day.

He was gruff and rude to his wife, and tyrannical to all who were in his power. As Dora had vexed him he determined to vent his displeasure on her family as well as upon herself, and he wrote to Captain Bouverie, requesting him to see about the payment of the debt he owed to him—a debt that the poor captain could no more pay than he could perform the feat of flying through the air.

Ellinor Bouverie was very unhappy at this time, especially as she saw her sister looking more and more miserable every day, and she did not like to ask the reason of her evidently depressed spirits, as Dora did not allude to any discomfort herself.

Mr. Clarke was out so much, attending to his official duties and other matters, that Miss

Bouverie did not often encounter him, but she could not be blind to the fact that Dora looked very often as if she had been shedding tears, and frequently seemed plunged in dejection.

"How do you get on at home now, Ellinor?" asked Dora one day, as her sister was sitting with her in her own house.

"Pretty much as usual," said Ellinor. "Papa is not so well now as he used to be, and my time is greatly occupied in thinking what I can do for his comfort. I am sorry Allan wants the money he lent him so badly just now, when we happen to have so little. I wish you could speak to him, and ask him to wait, at all events, till papa is better."

"Has he been tormenting papa about money matters?" asked Dora, quickly. "I thought when I married him he would not ask the money he lent him back."

"But I hope you did not marry for that reason," said Ellinor, sadly. "No one, surely, could have made such a condition as that to induce you to become Mr. Clarke's wife."

"Oh, no; not altogether that; but there was still something thought about the money

that papa owed my husband, and I was fully persuaded that it would never be asked back if I accepted Mr. Clarke."

"Well, it has been asked for now; and I want you to intercede with Allan about it."

"Oh! he would not mind me, Ellinor," replied Dora, hastily. "I have very little influence about anything with him. I think he looks upon me as a child. I should not like to ask any favour—I mean I should not like to—"

"My dear Dora, I do not like to hear you speak so," said Ellinor, sadly, as she saw her sister colouring and looking confused. "I am afraid you cannot be happy."

"To tell the truth, I am not happy," replied Dora, with tears starting to her eyes. "For some time past my husband has not been so kind to me as he used to be; and I assure you I have done nothing to cause any change in his behaviour."

"Is he, then, a very capricious person?" asked Ellinor.

"I cannot say. Of course, he may imagine grievances, and entertain wrong views of me; but it has always been my aim to contribute to his happiness since our marriage."

“And what imaginary cause is there for his alteration of manner towards you?” asked Ellinor, who felt much concerned.

Dora blushed very deeply, and was silent for some moments. At last she spoke—

“Unless I were to tell you a very long story, Ellinor, you could not comprehend the true state of the case. My husband is sometimes unreasonable and unjust, but I am always praying that I may not be roused beyond endurance.”

“For the sake of your own happiness, as well as his, my dear sister, I trust your prayers may be answered,” said Ellinor, impressively. “I do not wish to ask you to tell me anything except just what you choose to tell; but I hope you will always look upon me as a true friend in all times of need.”

“I have been hiding all my thoughts and feelings for months,” said Dora. “I have never said anything that I really thought or felt to you or anyone else for such a length of time. And yet I have got no good by this self restraint. I am just as miserable to-day as if I had never done anything towards preserving peace and comfort in my husband’s

home. He does not thank me in the least. He distrusts and misjudges me. Oh! he is very cruel and very hard, Ellinor."

"This will pass off in a short time," said Miss Bouverie, who was grieved to hear such words from her sister's lips. "You have just had some trifling disagreement, which has left an unpleasant impression on your mind."

"Oh! it will not pass off so lightly as you think," declared Dora, clasping her hands. "It is a graver piece of business than perhaps you dream of. When a husband is suspicious and distrustful, and jealous, he becomes intolerable."

"Jealous?" repeated Ellinor, looking suddenly surprised and more serious even than before. "You do not mean to say that Mr. Clarke is *jealous*?"

Dora lowered her eyes before the searching look of her sister's, and did not answer.

In spite of her natural wish to understand why the barrack-master should feel jealous of his wife, Ellinor Bouverie thought it well not to ask her sister any questions upon the subject. She was startled and uneasy, yet determined to subdue her curiosity; and when Dora did not reply to the observation

she had just made, she did not repeat the substance of it.

“Our life all through has not been a very happy one, I think, Ellinor,” said Dora, after a long silence had ensued between the sisters; “and already it seems to me that the best of my years are over. I scarcely look forward to any more peace or happiness in all the years to come; yet I had once my dreams of a bright future like other people—dreams that were destined never to be realised.”

Ellinor did not know how much reason her sister had to speak as she had just spoken. She thought her words might merely have been the result of recent vexation and excitement.

“I seem to myself to have been marked out for misfortune,” continued Dora; “such misfortune and misery as it is nearly impossible to bear patiently!”

“Do not exaggerate your unhappiness, dear Dora,” said Ellinor, sadly. “If you knew as much of the wretchedness of people, even in our own neighbourhood here around Norham, as I do, you would not think your griefs so very weighty and unbearable. What have I not seen of all kinds of distress,

poverty, and disease and starvation in the homes of the poor, where a ray of happiness can rarely penetrate. Some time ago I was very unhappy myself about many things; and when I went again, after an interval of time, among the cottages of the lowly people whom I used to visit, I was struck with what many of those poor creatures had to endure of bitter struggles and miseries that might make one shudder to think of."

"No bitter struggle or misery greater than my own," said Dora, fixing her eyes on Ellinor's face; "no sorrow or remorse so deep as mine; no self-reproach so never ending."

"Then you suffer from regrets?" said Miss Bouverie, with an interest of a very painful kind.

"I suffer all the tortures of mind that you could imagine!" replied Dora, impetuously. "I sit here all day alone thinking such strange things, and feeling my brain growing giddy from confusion of ideas. And then it seems so dreadful to know that, only for the smallest chance in the world, all might have been so different to me. I might have been the happiest person on the earth, instead of the

most miserable ! And it would have made a great difference to you also, Ellinor ; for I should have tried to be a better person than I am, or ever have been, or ever will be ; and you would have had no uneasiness about me any more. The world would have been bright then, bright as it is dark now, if that one unlucky chance had only passed by and let me be in peace !”

“ There is no such thing as chance, Dora,” said Ellinor, shaking her head. “ Providence orders all things wisely and deliberately. There are no random shots sent forth to wound unwary passers-by. All that happens has a meaning, hidden though that meaning may be for years and years—perhaps even for ever in this life—from our mortal knowledge.”

“ One unlucky chance, whether wisely ordained or whether for my good or the reverse, has embittered the whole of my earthly happiness ; yet, as far as I can see or believe, no one was to blame in the matter, except, perhaps, some stupid, dawdling, inefficient post-master or mistress, or letter-carrier.”

Miss Bouverie looked surprised and uneasy ; she could not comprehend what her sister

might allude to in her reference to a post-master or letter-carrier.

"Did you lose any letter, or write one that never reached its destination?" she asked, at length.

"Yes; I wrote a letter, the most important, in fact, the only important, one I ever wrote in my life, and it never went to the person I intended it for."

"And has that been the cause of the late misunderstanding between you and your husband?" asked Ellinor, who thought that Mr. Clarke had, perhaps, been unreasonably angry with his wife for what had really not been any fault of hers. "Had you written some business letter for him, and did it not reach its destination?"

"Oh! the letter had very little to do with my husband, except so far as this, that if it had gone on its way as safely as nearly all letters go, he would never have been my husband at all. It was a very important letter to me, Ellinor, though you never knew anything of it till now."

"Did it contain a refusal of Mr. Clarke's proposal?" asked Miss Bouverie, who felt much puzzled.

"In one way it contained a very decided refusal to marry him," replied Dora; "but it was not written to himself. The letter was to another person."

"You never told me of this before, Dora," said Ellinor, reproachfully. "I did not think you had had any confidante but me in the whole world."

"My dear sister, it was not because I had any idea of slighting or distrusting you that I did not torment you with confidences that might only annoy and worry you. It is only within the last few days that I have learned how much misery I might have been spared had that unfortunate letter reached the person for whom it was intended."

"But, as far as I can judge, Dora, it does not appear that dwelling upon this subject can be of any use now; in fact, it is worse than useless to cherish such thoughts. You are now the wife of Mr. Clarke, whose proposal of marriage you accepted entirely of your own accord; and your own sense of justice and religion must tell you that to indulge in any sentiments that are disrespectful or antagonistic to him or his peace of mind is sinful in the extreme."

“And if he is disrespectful and unjust, and cruel to me, am I to bear it all calmly? Am I to make a pretence of feeling what I cannot feel, and of thinking what I cannot think?” asked Dora, as her eye kindled and her face flushed.

“You are to subdue all thoughts that you know in your heart to be contrary to what is right,” answered Ellinor, gravely. “His conduct cannot excuse any deviation from duty on your part.”

“It is easy for you to talk in that way,” exclaimed Dora, rather indignantly; “for you, who do not comprehend what real suffering is! You may imagine that our home cares and duties were of a very miserable character, but they were nothing at any time to the sort of misery I suffer. You know nothing of such disappointment as I have experienced, and of the brightest hopes suddenly being extinguished and crushed, when I believed them to be on the point of being realised! If you did, Ellinor, you would never sit there and tell me calmly that I was to subdue all thoughts that I knew in my heart to be contrary to what is right.”

Ellinor sighed sadly, and perhaps with some

self reproach. If Dora had not confided fully in her, she knew that she had not confided fully in Dora. All the suffering she had undergone from sorrow and disappointment for many dreary weeks remained a secret from her sister and from the whole world.

“From what I can gather from your conversation, Dora,” she said, “I suppose you had made some other choice before you were led to accept Mr. Clarke’s proposal; but that does not signify much now. You know what your duty as a wife is. Happily, it is very rare, indeed, in our country for a woman to forget what she owes to herself and her husband, and all her friends, in such a case as this; and I am certain, my dear sister, that you have too much good sense and good principle to admit of any warning being necessary to keep you in the right way.”

Miss Bouverie pressed her sister’s hand, and kissed her affectionately as they parted soon afterwards; yet still she felt very sad and anxious, with a dawning of the truth beginning to break upon her understanding.

CHAPTER XI.

MRS. BARR ASKS SOME PUZZLING QUESTIONS.

ONE evening Mr. Trydell was sitting in his lodgings at the Barrs' house in Church street, when the door of his room was opened, and Mrs. Barr entered. She did not for some time speak, or state what business had brought her up to the chaplain's sitting-room; nor did she make a feint of arranging any piece of furniture.

Mr. Trydell had been reading; but he soon put his book down and looked up, when he found Mrs. Barr standing silently at the

table watching him with anxious countenance.

"Well, Mrs. Barr," he said, quietly.

"I am sorry, sir, to disturb you," she answered, after a short pause, "but I have a little matter to tell you of—not so little a matter either, as far as I and my family are concerned, though no doubt to you and others of a higher sphere than mine, such things may seem trifles."

"I never consider anything a trifle, Mrs. Barr, that concerns the happiness or well-being of anyone," replied the clergyman, truthfully.

"I ought to know that by this time, sir," she said, "for I have troubled you greatly of late about many things that were even more trifling than the one I have come to speak about now, which is no less than to say that we will be obliged to give up this house next month, as the landlord is going to let it to some one else, and we can't make up the half-year's rent that's due several weeks ago. So you see, sir, that the roof is to be taken from over our heads, and the bread out of our mouths, all owing to a foolish quarrel, which has been the means of bringing us to ruin,

and placing us on a par with the lowest people."

Mr. Trydell was going to say, "Well, I always foresaw what might come of your husband's refusal to attend to the advice I gave him," but he reflected that it would be of no use in the world to utter such words now, though they naturally rose to his lips; so he only said, "I am very sorry, indeed, for you all, Mrs. Barr."

"I am sure of that, sir, and we stand in need of compassion. All that we have to depend upon now is Lucy's work; but there isn't much to be earned by the needle, though it's the fittest way a woman can attempt to earn money."

"In my opinion, Mrs. Barr, the fittest way for a woman to earn her livelihood is the way that she can follow with the greatest ease to herself, and which brings her the best remuneration, provided it is honest and respectable," said the chaplain.

"Yes, sir, but you wouldn't have her step out of her sphere to gain money?"

"It is a difficult matter to step out of our sphere, Mrs. Barr," returned Mr. Trydell, seriously, "and I scarcely think that any work

that we attempt will admit of our doing so. The man who sits at a desk all day making up accounts will have, no doubt, just as brave and manly a spirit as the soldier who is called upon to fight and win battles, and the woman who is occupied in making or mending clothes will not possess any more feminine attributes, any greater kindness of heart, than if she were employed in some way that would bring her a greater amount of profit."

"I don't know, sir, I am sure; but I would be relieved to find out that Lucy *could*, without disparagement to her sex, get something more for her work, and be able to provide a little better for her brothers and sister, especially as I think the needlework ain't a very healthy employment, as sometimes she feels quite faint and exhausted at the close of the day; and then there isn't much comfort for her to be had out of the earnings, except just a bit of dry bread and a cup of tea, which isn't to say very nourishing, let a person be man or woman."

"And you think of leaving this house, Mrs. Barr."

"Yes, sir. We think of it, and know we must leave it, whether we like it or not; and

then you understand, sir, that we won't be able to have a lodger in the next place we go to, as it will be some small cottage, or maybe only a couple of rooms in some other person's cottage."

"And what does Barr say to that?"

"Very little, sir. I wish he would speak more, and say what he means to do. Sometimes, Mr. Trydell, I have great fears about Barr."

Here Mrs. Barr lowered her voice, and looked very grave, indeed.

"What kind of fears?" asked the chaplain.

"Perhaps I shouldn't express them," said the upholsterer's wife. "Perhaps it wouldn't be just or right to do it, even in your presence, Mr. Trydell. But whatever comes to pass, let no one think that I ever encouraged my husband in all that he has done or said concerning Mr. Clarke. I had nothing to do with the quarrelling from first to last. I am not in any way to blame."

"I never thought you were, Mrs. Barr," replied Mr. Trydell, who was rather surprised at his landlady's words and at her manner. She seemed to him to speak somewhat hardly of her husband, and as if she did

not wish to identify herself with him at present.

"Whoever may give up Barr, or may think he has acted against his own interests, surely *you* do not intend to forsake him?" he said, after a pause. "I have no doubt that he has done very foolishly in this unfortunate business, which has had such sad results for you all; but still, Mrs. Barr, I am sure he believed himself to be in the right, and that he did not act merely from malice or revenge."

"And do *you* believe he was right?" demanded Mrs. Barr.

"Certainly not, but I believe he *thought* he was."

"I don't know," said Mrs. Barr, looking on the ground, and speaking thoughtfully; "I don't know what he thought, or what he thinks now. I believe, Mr. Trydell, that I never understood Barr's real character yet, in all the years we have lived together, though I thought I did. And I don't believe that you understand him either."

"That may be," observed the chaplain, who still entertained the idea that the wife was speaking very harshly of her husband.

"Yes, it may be, and it is so," continued Mrs. Barr; "and I solemnly declare this day that nothing would surprise me that he did. I am prepared for everything now—prepared for everything but being accused of countenancing or supporting him and his doings in the smallest degree."

"But Barr has always been a good husband and father, has he not?"

"*Never* a good husband or father," replied Mrs. Barr emphatically, now raising her sharp eyes and fixing them steadily on her lodger's face, which had assumed a surprised and concerned expression as she uttered the words. "No man can be accounted good at any time that is past when he turns out in later years the contrary. If Barr had ever been a really good, dutiful man he could not have acted latterly in such a manner as showed such a disregard for his wife and family."

"But he had no idea that he was acting so foolishly and with such little hope of success," said Mr. Trydell.

"He would never have risked what he risked if the thought of duty had been before his eyes. Even if Mr. Clarke was as great a wretch as he tried to prove him, even if he

was a far greater one than he wished the world to believe him to be, he should have left the matter for others to investigate rather than take up his money out of the bank to spend it uselessly, and I may say sinfully; and, rather than lose all his own time (which wasn't his own either, so to speak, for, in all reason, it belonged to his family as much as to himself) gathering up evidence and searching out for proofs of the barrack-master's fraudulent practices."

Mrs. Barr here ceased speaking for a little time, but she made no movement to leave the room, neither did she stir from her position before the table at which she had been standing ever since she entered the apartment.

At length she spoke again.

"And now, Mr. Trydell, let me ask your opinion upon one particular point. Do you consider it to be the duty of a wife to stand by her husband when she believes him to be in the wrong?"

"Not so far as the wrong-doing is concerned, but in other respects she should remain his adviser and friend."

"And if he scorns her advice and acts altogether contrary to it?"

"Still she is bound to do her duty towards him. In the course of time he may learn to value her forbearance and her wisdom, and to be led back to a proper sense of what he owes to her."

"And is she to pretend to the world that she approves of what her conscience tells her is wrong and wicked in him?"

"She need not make a confidant of the world. If she is a sensible woman few people will consider her responsible for what he does, and they will only respect her more and more for never speaking against her husband."

Mrs. Barr held her peace for a little while again before she resumed,

"And suppose a man committed some great crime, would his wife be expected to stand by him and not condemn him as other people would?"

"She would be expected to condemn the crime, of course."

"And to live still with the man who committed it."

"If the crime were a very serious one she would not have a chance of living long with him," replied Mr. Trydell, "as in all proba-

bility he would be taken up and punished by the laws of his country by being either hanged or sentenced to penal servitude for life."

The upholsterer's wife grasped the edge of the table with both hands as Mr. Trydell spoke, and fixed her eyes upon his face with a somewhat wild expression.

"But if the law couldn't find him guilty—if by some chance his crime was never suspected or found out by anyone except the wife herself—what should she do then?"

The chaplain met the earnest gaze of his companion with a penetrating look from his own eyes, but she did not shrink from the scrutiny.

"Her own judgment would, no doubt, guide her as to what she should do," he replied. "You are supposing a case, Mrs. Barr, which is not a very common one, and which, I trust, you may never know anything more about than you do now."

"It is my own opinion that the wife of a guilty man should leave her husband," declared Mrs. Barr, emphatically—"leave him as soon as she knew of his crime, and never return to him again all the years of her life!"

And then both she and the chaplain remained silent, looking at each other across the table, which the upholsterer's wife continued to grasp with both hands.

CHAPTER XII.

PATTY'S INTERVIEW WITH MRS. CLARKE.

ELLINOR BOUVERIE was uneasy about her sister, but owing to her father's state of health she could not often leave him to visit Dora.

She knew that her sister went a good deal into society at Norham, and was told that she always looked handsomely dressed, and very beautiful at the different parties she attended, yet still Miss Bouverie felt ill at ease and doubtful, with a vague sort of feeling that something unpleasant might yet occur to make her still more anxious.

One morning she made up her mind to

walk over to the barrack-master's house, and on arriving there she asked to see Mrs. Clarke.

"The mistress has not been very well to-day," answered the servant. "Perhaps she may not wish to see anyone."

"She will surely see me," observed Miss Bouverie.

"I don't know," said the servant, who looked mysterious and doubtful, and seemed disposed to speak in low tones.

"I hope there is nothing serious the matter with my sister?" continued Ellinor, who felt uneasy.

"I hope not, ma'am ; I don't know," replied the man. "If you'll step in, I shall ring for her maid, and find out if she has lain down."

The maid appeared in due course of time, looking as mysterious and doubtful as the man, and rather puzzled also.

"What ails your mistress?" asked Ellinor, feeling more and more anxious as she observed the peculiar expression of the girl's face.

"She isn't to say so very ill," replied the maid ; "but she has been troubled like in her

mind about something, and she desired us to say she wouldn't be at home to-day to anybody, ma'am."

"But she must be at home to me," said Ellinor, firmly. "She did not mean to deny herself to me."

"I don't know, indeed, ma'am, but I will just see," observed the girl, who seemed rather perplexed between her wish not to offend or appear disrespectful to Miss Bouverie, and her fear of incurring her mistress's vexation.

Ellinor walked into the large dining-room which opened from the hall, and sat there till the servant maid returned from her expedition upstairs.

When the latter made her appearance again she handed Miss Bouverie a slip of paper upon which these words were traced, in a very unsteady hand, in pencil:—

"Do not ask to see me to-day; it could do neither you nor me good to meet. I have made a most fearful discovery of fraud and treachery which has nearly driven me distracted. Do me a favour—*send Patty to me without fail* this evening. I shall speak with

her in my own room. Ask her no questions when she returns to Evergreen.

“Yours,
“DORA.”

Ellinor was astonished when she read the words; but she rarely lost her presence of mind, and knowing that the eyes of the waiting-maid were fixed upon her countenance while she read the slip of paper, she endeavoured to control all expression of anxiety or surprise.

“Your mistress wishes to be quiet to-day,” she said, carelessly. “I will not disturb her by any more messages at present, except that you may tell her by and bye that I shall send Patty Evans to her this evening, and I hope she will find her better.”

Ellinor then asked if Mr. Clarke was at home, but received an answer in the negative; and without any further comments she left the house, feeling very much perplexed and extremely uneasy as she walked back to Evergreen.

“Dora cannot be very seriously ill, I suppose,” she thought, as she went along, “as her husband is away at his business as usual.”

And then it occurred to her that perhaps her sister might have been annoyed at some discovery of a servant's treachery, and was merely suffering from excitement and displeasure. She knew that Dora was prone to exaggerate any trouble or difficulty that she might be placed in; and the request to see Patty, the servant, which was expressed in the few hurried lines, nearly confirmed Ellinor in this view of the matter.

She sincerely wished it might be so, though, to tell the truth, it was not a very reasonable surmise in any respect.

Passing the road to Evergreen, she was overtaken and joined on the way by Mr. Trydell, who seemed in very good spirits.

"Did you know that the Barrs were to leave their house in Church-street in a few days?" he asked.

"Yes; Lucy told me so," replied Ellinor, who never liked speaking of the Barrs now, both on account of Lucy's acquaintance with Rachel Hammersley's brother and the upholsterer's conduct towards Mr. Clarke, though she had not given up employing the former.

"Your sister sent for Abraham Barr late last evening," said Mr. Trydell.

"Dora!" said Ellinor, who was very much surprised.

"Yes. I hoped that, perhaps, she was going to give him some advice that might be useful to him, for I fear he is a very silly man."

"I don't know, indeed," returned Ellinor. "She always spoke of Barr to me as an extremely obnoxious person, and seemed to have a very bad opinion of him."

"It was natural that she should take her husband's part," continued Mr. Trydell. "I should think Abraham has suffered enough by this time to teach him discretion."

"No one put the least faith in anything he said against Mr. Clarke," returned Ellinor; "yet still I pity his family greatly."

Miss Bouverie was much puzzled in thinking why Dora should have sent for the upholsterer the previous evening.

"If the Barrs leave Church-street I must leave it also," resumed the chaplain. "And it is a curious coincidence that, just as I am about to leave one place, I have got an offer of another, which, if I accept, will take me altogether away from Norham."

"I am so sorry!" said Ellinor, quickly;

"but I hope it will be a change for the better."

"Yes, in a worldly point of view, it promises to be very much better, indeed. My cousin, Colonel Barton, has a large property in Shropshire, and he has just lost his nephew, who held the living of Compton Beckworth, which is in the colonel's gift, and he now offers it to me, as I am the only relation he has in the Church. The living is a very good one, the income being seven hundred a year."

"And now, I must say, I am so glad!" said Ellinor, smiling with real pleasure; "for, although people may pretend to despise money, it is a very useful thing, and gives a person the means of doing so much good. No one deserves prosperity more than you do. Of course you will accept the offer?"

"I suppose so," replied Mr. Trydell, and then he paused.

"And you will go away and become interested in other people and other places," said Miss Bouverie, "forgetting us all here at Norham."

"You really think so?" he asked.

"I am afraid of it. I never heard you

“speak of anything that happened to you or anyone in the places you were in before you came to Norham.”

“But people do not speak always of what they are thinking,” he said. “I have a very vivid remembrance of persons I have met during my career as a minister of the Gospel, and I retain many friends among them; but still Norham has been a far more interesting place to me than any other I have yet been in.”

“Indeed?” said Ellinor, who knew that her companion was not much given to flattery.

“Yes, most truly, and it is by no means likely that I shall ever forget the place or the people.”

“In some respects Norham is an interesting place,” observed Ellinor, after a little pause. “It has a large and ever changing population, like all great military stations, and you must have seen a good deal of character during your stay here. But, as well as I could judge, you had far too much work to do. I often used to think how very, very weary you must have been at the close of each day.”

“And yet it may be that I shall be more weary and more wretched at Compton Beckworth than ever I have been before,” continued the chaplain. “It may be that when I take my last look at Norham I shall bid adieu to the only hope I have of ever being really happy in this world !”

Ellinor looked surprised, and turned her beautiful eyes inquiringly on her companion's face. Was she very hard of comprehension, think you, reader?—she who was often so quick to understand what puzzled others?

“If you do not like the idea of going to Shropshire you should not think of it,” she said. “You might soon get something better, or as good, if you were to wait for it.”

“I have been always very patient,” he said, smiling curiously, “and now this offer of a living has come to me quite unexpectedly ; yet still it does not satisfy me, and it might be that I should find the old rectory the very dreariest of houses, and the neighbourhood the most uninteresting of places.”

“So that the prosperity, after all, will turn you discontented,” said Ellinor, laughing. “You had surely better stay where

you are, and leave Compton Beckworth to somebody else."

"But the question is, whether staying at Norham, would make matters any better," said Mr. Trydell. "It might happen that, whether I went or stayed, I should at length be plunged in misery and hopelessness."

"Then you are determined to be wretched," observed Ellinor, who began to have a faint glimmering of a small part of the truth, but not of any concern she might herself have in the matter of her companion's happiness or unhappiness.

They were now at the gate of Evergreen.

"Will you come in and see papa now?" said Miss Bouverie.

"Yes, with pleasure, if you wish it," he answered, and then they both walked up the little avenue.

Every step of the way now seemed to Mr. Trydell as enchanted ground. How often had he looked in at the gate upon that little avenue, and the flower-plots round the house, with a feeling that it was all forbidden ground—a sort of charmed spot, where he might not hope to put his foot.

A turning point seemed to be coming in his life at last. That morning had opened auspiciously for him. Coming into his sitting-room in the Barrs' house in Church-street, at half-past seven o'clock, he had found a letter lying on the table for him, informing him that he might have the living of Compton Beckworth if he wished; and later in the day he finds himself invited to visit at the house where he had so often wished to be upon friendly terms with the occupants in bygone days; and the person who had given the invitation was the one he prized above all the occupants.

Yet still there was something unfinished—something that might remain unfinished to the end of time.

As he and his companion entered the half-open door, and stood in the hall, both were filled with grave thoughts. Miss Bouverie, who was thinking of her ailing father, felt it a solemn time, indeed, for her, and there were tears in her eyes when she opened the drawing-room door, and said that she would go and speak to her father, if Mr. Trydell would walk into the drawing-room, and remain there for a few minutes.

Into the drawing-room he accordingly went, and sat down in a chair before a table whereon were placed a few books, and a vase of flowers, no doubt freshly gathered from the charmed flower-plots without, with here and there some little pieces of fancy work, which were supposed by the looker-on to have come especially from the hands of the enchantress of the spot.

The house seemed very still, and the clock in the hall could be heard ticking ceaselessly through the drawing-room door, which stood a little ajar.

A great many thoughts occupied the clergyman as he sat waiting for the return of Miss Bouverie, and at length she came to say that her father would be happy to see him. "Resigned" to see him would have been a more truthful term for her to have used in delivering this message; but, even while we stand on the very threshold of death's door, we still cling to the world's little customs of politeness, and to words of conventional propriety; and when Mr. Trydell came up into the sick-room to talk with the invalid, whose emaciated form and worn countenance told but too plainly that the world and its rules

would soon be little, indeed, to him, the invalid, knowing this better even than those around him, was polite and conventional, and gave his pallid hand to the chaplain, with his accustomed air of good breeding, and made a few remarks such as he might have made at any time to a friend at his club, or in meeting him in the street.

Ellinor soon left the room, hoping that when she was gone her father might touch upon such subjects as would be of benefit to him. She then went to inform Patty, the servant, that she was to go to Mr. Clarke's house that evening, as her sister wished to speak to her.

As it was now September, the evenings did not seem so long coming round as in the full summer time, and the weather was not quite so warm or bright. The past night had been particularly stormy for the season, and the heavy rain of the last week had swollen the river at Norham so much that in some places it was feared it might burst its bounds and inundate the houses near it. It could be heard far off rushing on its turbulent course, even as far as Evergreen, just as it often was heard in the midst of winter.

When it grew dusky Patty donned her bonnet and shawl, and hastened to Mr. Clarke's house, wondering what "Miss Dora" wanted with her now, when she had never sent for her before, even to see her new house—a circumstance that had bitterly offended her, though she kept the matter proudly to herself, not knowing how little either of her young ladies were dreaming of her mortified feelings.

Upon arriving at the barrack-master's house she knocked her single knock, and the door was opened by the man who had opened it in the early part of the day for Miss Bouverie, looking, as he did then, mysterious and solemn, perhaps more mysterious and solemn than he had done then.

"Well, young woman?" he said, as if he rather thought Patty had no right to come to the door and knock for admittance.

"I'm come to see Miss Do—, I mean, I'm come to see Mrs. Clarke, as she told me," she replied, with an air of firmness and confidence.

"Well, it isn't likely you can see her," replied the man, "for she hasn't seen no one this day but her maid."

"She told Miss Bouverie to send me to her," persisted Patty, stoutly; "and if it comes to that I have as good a right to see her as any maid in this house, seeing that I was living in the house with her longer than anybody here. I'm no stranger at all."

"I'll say you're here if you'll give your name," said the man, seeing that Patty, who was large enough to be pretty formidable-looking, was determined to see his mistress.

The girl gave her name, thinking that it was a very grievous thing to be treated in this way by the servants of Miss Dora, and feeling that there was something rather insulting in having to disclose her name in this manner.

The waiting-maid having been appealed to, it was ascertained that Mrs. Clarke would see Patty Evans, who received the information with a look of wrath and contempt, directed towards the said waiting-woman, whom she fancied she saw, by the light in the hall, eyeing her shabby costume with a gaze of calm disdain, though in truth this was not the case, for the maid was thinking of something very different. Proud and angry, Patty was conducted upstairs into the presence of the lady

of the house, and was shut into the room where Mrs. Clarke was sitting alone ; but, as the girl looked at Dora's face, her resentment gave way to other feelings. She forgot her own imaginary wrongs in concern for the lady before her.

Dora's face had become so ghastly and so worn in the space of a single night and day, that she looked as if she had just risen from a bed of deadly illness.

" You've been very ill, miss, I think," said Patty, kindly.

" Oh, no ; not very ill. I'm better now," said Mrs. Clarke, hurriedly. " I sent for you, Patty, upon a very important subject, and I hope you will answer me truly and honestly."

" Yes, miss, to be sure," said Patty, feeling a little uneasy, as was natural.

" You remember that I wrote very few letters to any one," resumed Dora, looking straight at the girl with eyes that seemed strange and wild in expression, and of a very much larger size than usual.

" Yes, miss, very few. Miss Ellinor wrote them nearly all when you were both at Evergreen."

"Yet you may recollect one letter that I wrote and sent to the post with you some months ago—a letter that I told you was very important, and that I wished particularly to be posted in time for the one o'clock mail."

Patty paused, and looked on the ground as if trying to remember, though I'm afraid she remembered the letter perfectly without any such process.

"Think well," said Dora, who seemed restless and excited, as she got up and pulled aside the window-curtain and looked out, though it was quite dark by this time, and there was no moon or star.

"I'm thinking, miss."

"And you recollect the letter?"

"I'm thinking, ma'am."

"How much longer are you going to remain thinking?" asked Dora, impatiently. "You surely do not mean to deny that you recollect that remarkable letter?"

"I don't deny it, Miss Dora; I did not say so; I was only thinking."

"And what have you found out by thinking? Wretched girl!" exclaimed Dora, in sudden excitement; "do not stand there and

provoke me by such answers! You know what you did with that letter—you know what a traitress and miserable wretch you have been to me, and what you have to answer for!"

Patty dared not to raise her eyes or meet the wild look of the lady—who had now approached her very closely and stood with clasped hands—trembling in every fibre—yet upheld by the strength of her emotion, and her deep despair.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MESSAGE TO ABRAHAM BARR—PER- PLEXITIES.

As Mr. Trydell had informed Miss Bouverie, a messenger had come one evening from Mrs. Clarke to the Barrs' house, stating that the lady wished to see the upholsterer, who had just sat down to supper.

"Barr can't go anywhere, good man, till he has his tea," said Mrs. Barr, who had grown sharp and not very courteous of late, as the messenger told his errand. "It's a queer hour for anyone to send for him."

"There's nothing queer about it," returned

the upholsterer, who, having become somewhat contradictory of late in the bitterness of his soul, chose to take a view directly opposite to that which was taken by his wife. "Mrs. Clarke may have something particular to tell me, and I won't refuse to go to her. Whatever Clarke may be, *she* at least comes of an honest, respectable family. Husbands and wives are mostly unlike each other in principles, and it may be that she is beginning to repent of what has been done against me."

"If it was Miss Ellinor Bouverie that had sent for you I would put more faith in her good intentions," declared Mrs. Barr, who feared the strong cup of tea she had just poured out for her husband would be all so much waste, and that the chop she had contrived to get for his supper would never be eaten by him, after all her trouble to procure not only the tea and bread and meat on the table, but the very fuel that cooked the viands.

The time had come when the coals were scanty in the upholsterer's *menage*; and the light of even a dip candle was a luxury that could not be indulged in on an unlimited

scale. No longer, as in past times, did the kitchen fire send forth its broad, bright blaze to cheer the dull autumn evening—no longer did the young people of the family gather round the well-stocked supper table to eat as much as they pleased, or to grumble over wholesome bread and butter. Things were sadly changed of late. Yet still Mrs. Barr, notwithstanding the severity of her condemnation of her husband's conduct, would not abate any of her former care for his creature comforts, and she appropriated the greater part of Lucy's earnings for the purpose of procuring dainty morsels for the upholsterer, that he might not suffer too severely in his reverse of fortune. Yet she did this so silently, and with so little demonstration of tenderness, that nobody could have suspected that she took any particular pains in providing for her husband. How she stinted herself in the very necessities of life that her children might not feel hungry, or thirsty, or cold, none knew save herself. Severe and grim and very thin she looked, with sharp features and a sharp voice, and a general appearance as if doing her duty was hard work indeed, for she did not pretend to be at all more

amiable than she really was, and she bestowed few kind words upon anyone.

It annoyed her when Barr left his untasted cup of tea to obey the summons of Mrs. Clarke, chiefly because she did not well know whether she might be able to procure such refreshment for him upon another night; but after the first moments of disappointment and displeasure were over she relented a little, and poured the tea back into the teapot, placing the latter on the hob of the kitchen grate, and putting the discarded mutton chop on the fender to keep it warm between two plates, thinking her husband might not be very long away after all.

Before leaving the house, the upholsterer had taken a large stick, which he generally used of late when walking out, from its place in a corner of the kitchen, and this, with his hat, was all he required to complete his preparations for his evening expedition. Mrs. Barr had never liked the sight of that large stick; she eyed it with suspicion and distrust, and, without knowing exactly why, felt that she would have preferred Barr leaving it always in its place in the kitchen corner to his bringing it out with him.

The time was approaching very closely when the Barrs were to leave their house in Church-street, and descend to a more humble abode.

"We're too old now to think of ever being well-off in the world," thought poor Mrs. Barr, as she sat that night over the fast-fading fire. "When people begin to spend the earnings they have gathered together before the proper time, they won't be likely to begin saving again." And then there came shadowy thoughts of America and Australia, and far-off lands where people fly to when fearful of disgrace and poverty in their own country at home.

Would Mrs. Clarke really befriend them all yet, and get Barr reinstated in his old place as cabinet-maker and upholsterer to the garrison at Norham?

Hopes, doubts, and fears rose by turns to Mrs. Barr's mind as the time passed away, till the fire died out altogether, and the kitchen grew very gloomy; whereupon she betook herself upstairs to Mr Trydell's sitting-room, and informed him of the upholsterer having been sent for by Mrs. Clarke, and of her surprise that he had not yet returned home.

The chaplain had nothing particular to say on the subject; he did not think there was anything remarkable in what he heard, except the fact of the barrack-master's wife having wished to see Barr at all.

"It's not likely that she would give an order for furniture to him, I think," said Mrs. Barr, reflectingly; "yet he is so long away, that it looks as if she had some business of that sort; it's a very tedious thing giving directions about the shapes of chairs or loungers."

Mrs. Barr stopped speaking here, wishing she had not mentioned the word "loungers," as she suddenly remembered that the last remaining lounge in the possession of her husband and herself, which had been in their lodger's room till the previous day, had been sold for half its value the evening before to pay a debt; but Mr. Trydell had never missed this article of furniture from his apartment, and was therefore not aware of the loss of it, though it had cost his landlady many a pang to deprive him of it, even though he was not to be her lodger much longer.

"It would be a curious hour to give orders to a tradesman, I think," said Mr. Trydell.

"Yes, certainly, very curious ; but ladies and gentlemen are often peculiar and fanciful, and I believe Mrs. Clarke is not altogether remarkable for steadiness. She is just such a person as would take a notion on the spur of the moment."

The chaplain thought it very unlikely, indeed, that the wife of Mr. Clarke, who had been so annoyed by Abraham Barr, would thus, all at once, take him into favour and give him employment, let her be ever so fanciful or unsteady. Besides, he was quite certain that such a man as the barrack-master would not tolerate such a proceeding on the part of his wife—so utterly in defiance of what his wishes must naturally be.

"I am afraid your surmises are not very likely to be correct, Mrs. Barr," he said. "Whatever Mrs. Clarke may want with your husband, it cannot be to employ him about making furniture; she would never do that under the present circumstances."

"And I do not think that Barr would ever stoop to make as much as a footstool for her if she went upon her knees to him," returned Mrs. Barr, emphatically. "I only wonder

that he went up to the house at all, he is so bitter against them both."

So it all came round again to the same point that Mrs. Barr had started from. She could arrive at no fixed ideas on the subject of Mrs. Clarke's message to her husband. Perhaps it was all a mistake, and that there had really been no message from the lady at all. Such mistakes had often occurred before.

Mrs. Barr perplexed herself with various surmises respecting the matter till it was very late indeed, and still her husband was absent from home. He always kept a latch-key for the outer door about him, and therefore she thought, at last, that she need not sit up for him any longer. She would leave the hall door unbarred, and go to bed.

After deciding upon this course she remained up for about a quarter of an hour, listening to the storm, which now began to rise rather violently. It was a very dark night, and the wind was accompanied by much rain, which was driven against the windows with great fury at times.

It was nearly twelve o'clock before Mrs. Barr was in bed, and it was long past that

hour when she fell asleep ; but she never knew at what time Abraham returned to the house, or whether he came back before daylight.

When she saw him next morning she thought he had a strange expression of face ; it might have been merely fancy upon her part, but she had the impression that he looked more haggard and worn than usual, and he certainly seemed very silent and moody.

There were times when it was very hard to persuade the upholsterer to be communicative upon any subject, and the present instance was one of them. He would explain nothing satisfactorily. When asked about Mrs. Clarke's message, he replied that "it did not signify;" and when questioned as to when he had come home, he would not answer at all. He ate a very scanty breakfast, and would not touch the memorable mutton chop of the last night, which had been warmed over again for the morning meal.

"Where did you put your stick?" asked his wife, looking round for the large stick in vain.

Barr started, and looked round also.

"I suppose I left it somewhere," he replied, a little gruffly; "it's of no consequence; never mind the stick."

"You won't have it when you want it next, though," she said.

"It doesn't matter. Perhaps I may never want it any more."

"Was there any show or play going on at the theatre last night?" asked Mrs. Barr.

"No, not that I know of."

After saying which the upholsterer got up from his chair and walked to the open hall-door, at which he stood for some time whistling in a meditative mood.

Mrs. Barr removed the breakfast things thoughtfully, and somehow her eyes would keep wandering ever and anon to the corner of the kitchen, where the large stick usually rested when her husband was at home.

CHAPTER XIV.

ELLINOR HEARS UNEXPECTED NEWS.

ALTHOUGH trying not to think about the matter, and to devote herself to her usual occupations, Ellinor Bouverie still felt anxious as to what her sister might have to say to Patty; and, during the whole time that the girl was away from Evergreen, she could not think of much else.

Patty seemed to be a long time away, and Ellinor kept looking at the clock every ten minutes or so, as she made a mental calculation of how long it would take the servant to walk to the Clarkes' house, and how long it

would take for her to come back to Evergreen; then what length of time it would probably occupy for Dora to speak with Patty; and after making all this out, Miss Bouverie recollected that her sister had requested her not to ask the girl any questions when she should return to the villa.

When have the calculations been exact that people have made as to the flight of time or the expenditure of money? Very rarely, dear reader, as you may possibly know. Does a servant ever return from an errand as quickly as you expect him or her? Does a certain sum of money ever admit of your doing as much with it as you think it will?

In any case Patty did not come back for a full hour and a half after Miss Bouverie thought she might appear, and just as the latter was beginning to think it odd that she should loiter in this way, a knock came to the hall-door, which she thought might be Patty's summons for admittance. But on going down to ascertain if such were the case, she was surprised to find an orderly in uniform at the door.

The soldier asked if Mr. Clarke was at Evergreen? Miss Bouverie said no. Had

he been there that day? He had not. Did she know where he could be found? She did not. And then the man, who had some papers like official documents in his hand, went away.

For a little time Ellinor felt posed by this circumstance, but soon gave up thinking of it. There was nothing very strange in the orderly coming there to look for the barrack-master if he could not find him at his own house.

She then went up to her father's room to sit with him, as was her custom in the evening at this time.

"There will be a storm to-night again, Ellinor," said Captain Bouverie, as the wind moaned drearily outside, and Ellinor drew the window-curtains close together.

"Yes, I think so, papa."

"I wonder Dora did not drive or walk over to see me to-day. I am afraid she cares very little about me."

"I daresay she was not out to-day; she does not often go out in the afternoon."

"Except to some gaiety—a pic-nic or archery meeting. Well, I suppose I do not deserve much better treatment from my

children. Probably I was not very attentive to *my* father and mother when I was young myself. That is one consolation the old may have when neglected and slighted by the young; they may know that the young will soon be old in their turn, and become the old bores and fogies at last themselves. It seems a very short time, Ellinor, since I was young and beginning life, and full of hopes that were never realised. I suppose all young people have ridiculous hopes, and aspirations, and notions that they will be happier and more prosperous than anybody else before them ever was. I daresay *you* sometimes think, or have thought the same.

"Perhaps I have," said Ellinor, sighing.

"And what do you think or hope for now?"

"Very little for myself," replied Ellinor, truthfully; "I suppose I have passed the age for dreaming."

"At twenty-one?"

"Ah! one finds out a great deal before that age," said Ellinor, smiling sadly. "Elderly people who think twenty such a youthful time of life, forget what they were themselves at that age. It is my own belief

that the person who is thoughtless or silly at twenty will probably be the same at thirty or forty."

"Of course, you have thought of marrying some time or other?" observed Captain Bouverie.

"Not often," said Ellinor, as a faint shadow passed over her face.

"But sometimes? You have had admirers, no doubt, of whom you have never spoken to me?"

"Very few that I ever gave more than a passing thought to, papa."

"But, perhaps, there have been some who have never spoken of their feelings towards you—some whom you would have regarded favourably if you had been aware of their true sentiments?"

"I cannot say; I have thought very little upon the subject."

"And yet you must have known that you could have no fortune—scarcely any provision for your future years, unless you married?"

"Yes, I certainly knew all that; but I never could feel that I ought to marry merely because I was without fortune. My nature

is not so very pliable that I could make myself attached to anyone who might be a good match."

"But there is such a thing as gratitude, and duty, and doing what you think would be for your own welfare and the satisfaction of your friends. There are many reasons that sensible women marry for without being very much in love."

"And it is a pity for the men they marry, that is all I can say," said Ellinor, as her thoughts involuntarily turned to her own mother, who at this time betrayed so little concern or tenderness for her father, and who scarcely appeared to care particularly whether he lived or died; though for her children she had always been anxious when any of them had been ill—thus proving that she was not generally devoid of feeling.

"But if women were very fastidious and particular as to the men they married, they would have to remain often single and unprovided for," resumed Captain Bouverie. "While they were picking and choosing their husbands' time would pass by, and they would lose their best years and their chances altogether; and then what is to become of them?"

“That is the question that begins to puzzle people now-a-days, when the world is growing by degrees more and more enlightened,” replied Ellinor. “Formerly no one thought of caring what became of women, or whether they had any position of their own, or were merely ciphers in creation; but now, since they have begun to speak for themselves, public attention has been called to what is due to them.”

“For myself, I care very little what becomes of any woman who is not related to me,” said Captain Bouverie, frankly; “and if I were you, my dear, I should let all your sex do just as they please, and make a fuss about their wrongs and their rights, while you get the best you can for yourself in the *melee*.”

“Then you would not permit me to have any public spirit?”

“There is very little of such a spirit in the world among any people, whether men or women. What does your so-called public spirit come to? Nothing but self-aggrandisement and humbug and deceit in the end.”

“And, therefore, you would recommend the self-aggrandisement without the public spirit?”

"Without the humbug," replied Captain Bouverie; and then there was a pause in the conversation for a few minutes.

"Women are very quick-witted on some points," resumed Captain Bouverie, after being silent for some time; "and they generally find out pretty soon when a man has a *penchant* for them, so that I daresay, Ellinor, you know whether there is anyone in this neighbourhood who admires you particularly, though he may never have said a word to you on the subject."

A quick flush passed over Ellinor's face, which might have been caused by surprise or consciousness, or a nervous dread of what her father would say further.

She did not make any reply for a long time.

"I do not know that I am particularly quick-witted upon any point, papa," she said at last. "I know that both men and women are very apt to think people are in love with them when such is not the case at all; and, therefore, I am always unwilling to run the risk of making mistakes that might be absurd."

"Which is very sensible, certainly; but I

dare say for all that you cannot help fancying that such and such people admire you, and making up little romances in your own mind."

Ellinor knew that she had been guilty of making up, at least, one romance of the kind alluded to—a romance that seemed very wild to her now—and so she answered frankly—

"I suppose I have not always been wiser than my fellow mortals in that respect, papa," "but I do not think I shall indulge in such folly any more."

"Then you have had your romantic dreams?"

"It is not fair to question me too closely on such a point."

"But how have they ended, or are they ended at all?"

"All ended; gone for ever," she replied.

"And no traces, no regrets remaining?"

She did not answer.

"There is a good deal of nonsense written and thought about first love, and all that," said Captain Bouverie, after a pause. "Here am I; your mother was *my* first love, and I don't believe we got on a bit more happily than if she had been my tenth love. So if you

have had any silly romantic fancy that has passed away, let it not trouble you any more, but begin to think rationally of what may be really for your welfare, and if you get an eligible proposal do not reject it."

"But no one is thinking of proposing for me, papa," said Ellinor.

"Yes, my dear, I know one person who has already proposed for you."

"Impossible!" exclaimed Miss Bouverie, who recollected that no letter had come by post or otherwise that day.

"No, not impossible at all. This day I received a proposal for your hand, and I promised to exert my influence in inducing you to accept it."

"This day?" repeated Ellinor, wonderingly. Who had her father seen, or heard from, while she was out? She had been from home in the early part of the day, and somebody might possibly have sent a note while she was absent. The wildest thoughts came into her mind on the spot—thoughts that she herself, at least, considered very wild indeed a few minutes afterwards.

"And you really are not feigning this surprise, Ellinor?" said her father, as he watched

her countenance by the light of the blazing fire.

“Indeed I am not. I cannot even imagine who could have so honoured me.”

“How strange! And yet you have been acquainted with him for a very long time, and have met him very often.”

Ellinor shook her head hopelessly.

“There are a great many people whom I am acquainted with for a long time, and whom I meet often, but I have no idea of the particular person in question,” she said.

“You saw the person to-day, and you were speaking to him also,” continued her father.

Ellinor thought for a moment, and then a flash came into her eyes.

“You do not mean—?” she said, and then stopped.

“Mean what, my dear?”

“Mean to say that Mr. Trydell is the person who proposed for me this day?”

“Yes, I mean that; and I can only say that you must have been very stupid, or he a most undemonstrative admirer, if what he says is true, that he has loved you for the last two years most devotedly.”

“And I never knew it, and never suspected

it!" said Ellinor, wonderingly, as if she had just heard some extraordinary piece of intelligence which she herself had no concern in.

"How very strange!"

"Very strange, indeed, that you should have had so little penetration (or instinct, I believe, is what we call the penetration of women). Very remarkable, certainly; and I want to know if you are not happy and flattered, my dear?"

"Flattered I am, most assuredly, but not happy."

"And why not happy?"

"Because he has made a mistake in feeling anything for me beyond friendship."

"Ellinor, do not, I entreat of you, behave foolishly in this respect. Remember that it is no trifling matter to be thrown penniless on the world, without a home or provision of any kind, with a mother who will have little to exist upon either, with no protection or support for either of you. You know you have never been rich, but you do not know how much poorer it is possible for you to be; and here is an offer of a home and every comfort for you—aye, and not only for you, but for your mother also. *That* has been

promised, and I believe firmly in the faith and honour of the man that promised it."

"And I believe in it too, my father," said Ellinor. "I believe so firmly in his truth and goodness that, even if I were inclined, from selfish, mercenary motives, to take advantage of his offer, I would not do it. I would not sacrifice him, even if I could sacrifice myself!"

"You won't refuse him?" said the poor father, with his hand laid tremblingly on his daughter's shoulder. "Oh! Ellinor, don't say that you will refuse him."

"Do not pain me more than I am pained already," returned Ellinor, who looked sadly distressed. "You know I have never refused to do anything you have asked me to do; but in such a matter as this there is no choice—no alternative left for me."

"You say you believe Mr. Trydell to be a good man?"

"So I do; perhaps the best I have ever been acquainted with—far too good a man to be thrown away upon a person who has no heart to give in return for his."

Just then a faint single knock sounded at the hall-door.

Patty returned to Evergreen looking gloomy, and perhaps somewhat sulky and defiant; but Miss Bouverie asked her no questions relative to her interview with Mrs. Clarke, nor did the girl appear to wish to be communicative on the subject. She walked straight to the kitchen without making any remark, except that it was a wild night. Ellinor was going to ask if she had seen Mr. Clarke, but did not like to do so. She would resist her curiosity to find out anything at all about Patty's visit to the barrack-master's house, and adhere strictly to her sister's injunctions. She did not renew the conversation with her father that evening concerning Mr. Trydell's proposal, but the thought of it perplexed her.

So the night passed away, and the next morning came. This was not a cheering day. The weather was most dreary. Rain was falling all the morning—not a heavy, decided rain, but a stealthy, dismal drizzle, that made no sound as it descended upon the damp earth.

Ellinor was rather surprised by the arrival of Mrs. Dart soon after breakfast. That excellent lady had walked from Norham under

the shelter of a large umbrella, and had a bustling, energetic aspect as she came up the lawn to the villa. Miss Bouverie had not many weaknesses, but one of them was a general horror of the sight of her worthy relatives from the Copse when they appeared to pay a visit at Evergreen. There was no such thing as the possibility of giving a "not at home" order to prevent the invasion of these privileged and intimate friends. Let Ellinor be ever so ill or weary, and her mother ever so disinclined to see visitors, they could never deny admittance to Mrs. Dart or Mrs. Sharpoint if they were actually under the roof of the house. It was in vain to say that Mrs. Bouverie was "engaged," or that Miss Bouverie had a headache and was resting on the sofa, as Mrs. Dart was always satisfied to wait till the former might be disengaged, or ready to declare that she would just go up and speak to Miss Ellinor for three minutes and perhaps she might find out some remedy for her headache. There was no barricading Mrs. Dart out at all; no refuge from her presence anywhere in the house; so Ellinor could only put the bravest face upon matters,

and prepare to meet her with the best grace possible.

Patty had looked all the morning so sulky, and displeased, and mysterious, that Miss Bouverie felt rather afraid of her, and consequently averse to giving her many orders; another weakness of hers being a dread of ill-temper in a servant. For this reason she opened the hall-door herself for Mrs. Dart, instead of ringing the bell for Patty to perform that duty.

"How are you all, my dear?" asked Mrs. Dart, scraping the mud off her boots on the scraper, and afterwards wiping them vigorously on the door-mat. "How are you all this dreadful day; I never saw such weather in all the Septembers I have lived through."

"It is not a pleasant morning for a walk, certainly," said Ellinor.

"Pleasant! It was the most frightful one you ever beheld. Mud over the mouth of my galoshes, and the rain dripping from my umbrella till I had better have had none at all. Nothing but my great anxiety about you all could have induced me to venture out such a

day at the risk of my life, for you know how susceptible of cold I am, and how very little it would take to kill me."

"You had better come to the fire at once," said Ellinor, leading the way to the drawing-room.

"Oh, there is nothing so injurious as sitting over a fire," declared Mrs. Dart, who was always in apparent alarm about her health, yet never willing to use any precautions against getting ill. "You know it is my belief that you will kill your father if you keep such fires in his room. I have told you so, but you don't mind me. By-and-bye, perhaps, it will be proved that I was but too right."

Ellinor sighed heavily enough, but said nothing. Mrs. Dart looked at her with sharp, shrewd eyes for a few moments, and appeared to be plunged in thought for a little time before she spoke again. At last she said, in a somewhat low tone,

"Is not that a very odd business about Mr. Clarke?"

"What business?" asked Ellinor, a little anxiously.

She feared that there might have been some

new inquiries set on foot with reference to the barrack-master's official duties and accounts.

"Don't you know what every one at Norham is talking about?"

"No," replied Ellinor, beginning to feel nervous and uncomfortable.

"You need not deny anything to me," resumed Mrs. Dart, with dignity, "because I am one of the family, and you should understand by this time that I am not in the habit of talking of your affairs to every one. Besides, I have as good a right to wonder about your brother-in-law as all the people of Norham have; and it is a matter of public interest to know the meaning of this strange matter."

"What strange matter, Mrs. Dart? I have heard of nothing strange at all concerning Mr. Clarke. I neither saw him nor Dora these two days," replied Ellinor.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Mrs. Dart, in some excitement, mingled, probably, with a feeling of triumph. "How very strange and extraordinary! It is quite a mystery, and every one is speaking of it! I walked over first to see Dora before coming on here, but

she denied herself to me, as she nearly always does. I don't think I ever saw her twice in her own house since she married, so I could not find out anything from her ; and the servants would hardly condescend to speak, or answer any of my questions."

"But what has happened ?" asked Ellinor, in alarm.

"That is what I cannot tell ; that is what I came over here expecting to learn from you or your mother."

"You quite bewilder me," said Ellinor, hopelessly. "You say every one is talking of something concerning Mr. Clarke, and yet you do not tell me what it is."

"All I can tell you is, that Mr. Clarke has disappeared in some extraordinary manner, and no one knows how or where."

"Disappeared ? I suppose he has gone away somewhere," replied Ellinor.

"But would he go in that way without telling anyone—not even his wife?" asked Mrs. Dart, looking fixedly at Ellinor's perplexed countenance.

"I do not understand the matter at all," said Miss Bouverie. "I certainly never heard a word about Mr. Clarke having expressed

any intention of leaving Norham ; yet I do not think there is anything so remarkable about the circumstance, if he has really gone to London or elsewhere for a day or two. How does anyone know that Dora is ignorant of where he may be?"

"She can give no explanation, it seems, and there are several people wanting him upon business—people whom he ought to have told about his intention of going away, to prevent disappointment."

"I trust that no accident has occurred," said Ellinor, who had grown quite pale.

"That is what I cannot answer certainly. There may be an accident, or twenty things to account for this strange disappearance. Really it quite unhinges and perplexes me. This morning, when I was told that the barrack-master could not be found anywhere, I felt perfectly astounded, and could scarcely eat more than two mouthfuls of toast at breakfast, and just took two thirds of a cup of tea, so that I feel very faint now ; and if there is such a thing as a bit of bread—a crust, or anything—in the house, dear, I should like it. Excuse me, but I am so exhausted and worried."

CHAPTER XV.

ELLINOR BOUVERIE IS ENTERTAINED BY
SPITEFUL OBSERVATIONS.

MISS BOUVERIE went immediately to procure some cake and wine for her visitor, who, having been enlivened by partaking of such refreshment, continued to make further statements and observations concerning the mysterious disappearance of Mr. Clarke.

"Well, what will you do, Ellinor?" asked Mrs. Dart.

"I am afraid I can do nothing just at present. We must only wait and have patience."

"How supine you always are. Really, you are just like your mother. I wish often that I could take things as composedly as you do, but I always had too much feeling for that. I never could sit still and take my ease when any trouble came to those who were nearly related to me. Now, you know, if I had been like many others, I should have stayed at home this wet day, and just let the people say what they pleased about Mr. Clarke, without annoying myself in the least on the subject, or running the chance of getting cold by walking over here just to let you know how things were going on. Why, if a sister of mine was in Dora's place this day, I should have run off at once to her without thinking twice of rain or storm."

"I should go if I thought I could be of any service to her," said Ellinor.

"And how do you know that you could not be of some use to her?" inquired Mrs. Dart, fixing her eyes piercingly on her young friend's face.

"I know that I could not be of the slightest assistance in trying to find out where her husband is," said Ellinor. "If she is ignorant on the subject, I should only add my

perplexities to her own. Neither of us could do anything but wonder and conjecture."

"But you could sympathise with each other, and show some heart and some natural affection. I am afraid, Ellinor, you have got a very stoical sort of disposition. I often thought so before, you sometimes appear so strangely unconcerned about the most serious matters. It is easy to have a placid temper when one has got no feeling."

If Ellinor had really possessed as little feeling as her relative insinuated was the case, she would have experienced very few of the miseries that oppressed her at the present moment.

"Do you think your father is getting any better?" asked Mrs. Dart, as Miss Pouverie did not reply to her last speech.

"Not much, I am afraid."

"And do you intend to go on in this way, without calling in a physician?"

"Papa will not have one. He says he has no faith in doctors."

"It is the expense, I suppose, he objects to. But you should not encourage any such economy. If it was your last guinea you should not grudge it for medical advice for

your father. I never knew any good to come of stinginess and miserly saving. It generally brings ill-luck ; *that* you may depend upon."

"No one ever accused papa of miserliness," said Ellinor, quietly.

"No ; he certainly never had such an eye to saving as the rest of you."

"If some one in a family is not economical, there is generally a sad tale to tell in the end," observed Miss Bouverie.

"And I am sure I don't know what tale your family have to tell, with all your economy," added Mrs. Dart. "If anything happened to your father you know you would have very little to live upon. He told me so himself one day. When the head of a family is taken away the female part of it generally sink down into insignificance. If once your father was gone, Ellinor, you need not think you would have as good a chance of marrying as before. I know several girls who, after their fathers' deaths, never went into society at all, and were taken very little notice of. People dropped off from visiting or inviting them out ; and, of course, unless they have brothers, or money to entertain at home, they

have no chance of meeting men who would take a fancy to them, for men scarcely ever visit at houses where there are not other men residing, or where there is not good eating and drinking going on, and there is nothing more forlorn and ridiculous than a pack of girls all living together, even with a mother, where the income is small."

"Poverty is generally very ridiculous in the eyes of the world, I am afraid," said Ellinor.

"Yes, and it is so hard for girls without fortunes to get husbands now-a-days, let them be ever so well looking or accomplished."

"Did men not care so much about ladies' fortunes in former days?" asked Ellinor, smiling.

"Oh! no; not near so much. In my young days young men were quite different from what they are now. They had some heart, but selfishness is the fashion of late years."

"And yet heiresses were not despised in old times any more than now, Mrs. Dart," said Ellinor. "Silver and gold were always

considered desirable possessions for men and women."

"But there were decidedly more disinterested attachments and more real love-matches in the world in former days than now," replied Mrs. Dart, positively. "I don't believe there is one man in a thousand at the present time that thinks of marrying without first calculating how much money the lady of his choice is likely to have."

"If men have not much money themselves they would be very unwise to marry portionless women," said Ellinor.

"Oh! there are very few men or women that are so prudent as you are," returned Mrs. Dart, with a slight sneer. "People do not begin to calculate so soon as you seem to have done. For my part, I never thought well of young persons who thought too much of money. I would always say 'God speed' to the couple that were satisfied to marry upon small means and look to Providence for future help."

"But the man or woman who jumps into a fire, and trusts to Providence to keep him or her from being burned, will not be likely

to escape unhurt," said Ellinor. "We are permitted to use our own judgment and discretion in matters that relate to our worldly welfare."

"I thought you were very religious, and disposed to trust in Providence," observed Mrs. Dart. "People consider you very pious—I used to think you so myself, you went about so much among the poor, and taught in the Sunday-school, and all that. But where there is an unmarried clergyman in a parish girls are very fond of those sort of occupations."

Ellinor blushed so deeply at Mrs. Dart's last words that the latter paused in her speech, and looked at her fixedly, in a very embarrassing manner.

"I don't think Mr. Trydell will ever marry anybody," continued Mrs. Dart, after a lengthened silence, during which her young relative felt confused and unable to look her straight in the face. "It would be all a waste of time trying to catch him. If he had been a marrying man he would not have waited till this time of day before getting a wife, let his income be ever so small. When men say they cannot marry from want of

money, it is always just an excuse, and means that they don't want people to torment them about marrying. I often said to Mr. Trydell that I wondered he did not think of settling, but he always turned the conversation in such a way as makes me certain he has no idea of looking out for a wife."

Ellinor got up and looked out of the window.

"Oh! I forgot to tell you I was very angry a few days ago by hearing that people said you were quite a blue, setting up for learning beyond your sphere—woman's sphere, I mean—and I contradicted such a disadvantageous report as well as I could; and I hope there is no truth in it, for you know men can't bear learned women; they are so jealous of them," said Mrs. Dart.

"I have not such an unflattering opinion of men in general as to believe that, Mrs. Dart," said Ellinor, good humouredly. "I only wish I *was* learned; unfortunately I am not."

"So much the better."

"Not in my own opinion."

"Well, you may find out yet that I speak the truth. Every one knows men hate clever

women. It isn't natural for women to be learned."

"If that were the case they *could* not be learned. There is no fear of their going against nature."

"Oh! yes, there is. You know there are lots of unnatural, learned women. In fact, I think women are too fond of reading and poring over books, but if they knew their own interests they would study nothing but the cookery book."

"But you do not think ladies are like gourmands?" said Ellinor, smiling.

"No; but nearly all men are. There isn't a husband that wouldn't give all the wife's learning and accomplishments for a good dinner!"

"Oh, Mrs. Dart, spare poor men such a calumny!"

"Not a bit of calumny. Men like good eating, and hate learned women."

"A nice character to give them, certainly—jealous and gluttonous! Without going so far as some people who think the intellect of men superior to the intellect of women, I have not such a low opinion of the other sex as you have, Mrs. Dart. Do you not know that

jealousy is a failing peculiarly belonging to the lower animals, as likewise an inordinate love of eating?"

"Humph!" said Mrs. Dart, "I am afraid you are mistaken in that notion of the intellect of man and woman being equal. I read a very clever article the other day in the 'Helter Skelter Gazette' quite settling the question. It proved so many things against the theory—such as that no woman had ever yet equalled Wellington or Julius Cæsar as a military general, or Blackstone as a great lawyer, and that women were not employed as cooks in king's palaces, and didn't compose epic poems, and were not original, only copyists. As to their writing good novels, that is nothing. The 'Helter Skelter' proved that *that* was only owing to the fact that women read now-a-days a great deal of fiction, and had, of course, learned how to write it themselves. If they were kept from reading novels, there wouldn't be any female writers, you may be sure. And then as to deep learning, the 'Helter Skelter' proved that a first-rate woman was scarcely equal to a third-rate man."

"Which is very remarkable, considering

the advantages women possess, Mrs. Dart," said Ellinor, smiling, with an amused sparkle in her eye. "Think of the numerous universities that have been endowed for several hundreds of years exclusively for the benefit of women, and the rewards and titles of distinction given to scientific and learned women, and the great encouragement they receive from the State to persevere in the pursuit of knowledge."

"Oh! if women were really intellectual, they would break through all obstacles and disadvantages; so the 'Helter Skelter' says. There, now, *you*, with all your fine playing, couldn't compose an opera, I'll engage you?"

"No, nor have I ever seen the music of an opera from beginning to end in my life," said Ellinor, laughing. "If the 'Helter Skelter' judges of women's intellect by their not having composed operas, it had better reflect a little upon the circumstances that led any great musical composers to bring forth operas, where the composers were trained, and how employed previous to the composition."

"Humph! Well, still, there have been great men that have risen up from nothing,

and broken through all trammels. Don't you recollect Hugh Miller, that wonderful man who wrote about sandstone and rocks, and made himself very distinguished by his own energy?"

"Yes; and I also know that if a young woman in Hugh Miller's rank of life went about searching among stones, and wandering on the seashore looking for natural curiosities, she would soon be driven back to the house by her angry father and mother."

"And quite right, too! No young woman should be allowed to follow such gadding about."

"And, then, what about breaking through trammels and disadvantages, Mrs. Dart?"

"Oh! I won't argue any more. I hate the subject. Read the 'Helter Skelter' and learn wisdom from it."

Saying which Mrs. Dart wrapped herself up in shawls innumerable, and prepared to depart, leaving Ellinor very much perturbed in mind.

She did not mention anything to her father of what she had heard relative to Mr. Clarke's absence from his home and the neighbourhood, as she did not wish to render

him uneasy without first ascertaining the real state of the case; but as the afternoon advanced, she thought it advisable to walk to her sister's and learn how matters actually stood.

The rain had now cleared off, but the roads and streets were still muddy, and there was altogether a very dreary aspect over all outward things.

As Ellinor went along she thought of how dismal was the prospect of her future life—what length of years she might have to pass through, feeling as cheerless and hopeless as she felt that day. The visits and conversation of Mrs. Dart always put her in low spirits. Probably this was the result desired by the lady herself. To take people down seemed to be the self-appointed mission of the ladies at the Copse.

Now, Ellinor knew very well that if she were married and settled comfortably, according to the world's opinion, she would escape a great deal of the vexations she had to endure at present, but she also knew that she would run the risk of encountering many others undreamed of now. She had seen a great number of married women by no means

happy, though they might be rich and honoured, and thought well of in the world; and she was aware that there were many evils in this life worse than poverty or privation; yet, still, want of money, and want of the common comforts of existence, were not easy to endure; and, just now, upon this dull autumn afternoon, verging upon evening, Ellinor felt that perhaps she was unwise to think of rejecting that offer of a home and shelter from the cold, dark world, which she had still in her power to accept.

Although she could not be what could be called positively wealthy, she could, as the wife of Mr. Trydell, be placed in very respectable circumstances; her mother would be shielded as well as herself from the hardships and privations that threatened them both now, and it might be well for them if she could make up her mind to regard the clergyman's proposal in a favourable light. There was something of desperation in these reflections, it is true, but Ellinor was very weary and exhausted, and her spirit was waxing faint. As she was nearing the Clarkes' house she met Lucy Barr, looking extremely pale and bewildered.

"Oh, Miss Bouverie, has Mr. Clarke been heard of yet?" she asked, without prefacing the words by any greeting.

"I don't know, Lucy ; I'm just going to his house now."

"Oh, he isn't there, miss. He hasn't been there since the night before last. Everyone is wondering about him."

"We must find out all about it," said Ellinor, surprised at the girl's anxious, scared-looking countenance. "I shall soon see Mrs. Clarke, and she will tell me everything."

"Everything she *can* tell, of course," resumed Lucy. "God grant he may soon come back."

And then she hurriedly passed on.

Miss Bouverie knew that there could be no doubt now that the barrack-master had disappeared in some unaccountable manner, which was causing a great sensation at Norham.

"How good-natured Lucy Barr is to care so much," she thought, as the upholsterer's daughter left her ; and then, like lightning, a terrible thought flashed into her mind.

Why did Lucy really take such an interest in the matter ?

Miss Bouverie's hand was trembling as she raised it to the knocker of her sister's hall-door, and she felt scarcely able to speak audibly as she made the inquiry if Mrs. Clarke was at home.

Yes, she was at home.

"Can I see her?" asked Ellinor.

"Perhaps so, ma'am ; I'll try," replied the servant, who did not look so mysterious as upon the day before, but seemed rather more excited and bustling, as if there was something active to be done now.

After some time, Miss Bouverie, who was fearfully agitated and nervous as she stood in the hall waiting for her sister's answer, received permission to go up to Mrs. Clarke's room, and she ascended the stairs with a beating heart.

The ideas that had suddenly entered her mind respecting the barrack-master's strange disappearance confounded and overwhelmed her, and it was in vain that she endeavoured to banish them. She must try, above all things, not to let Dora fathom her thoughts on the subject.

"My dear Ellinor, how kind of you to walk over in such weather," said Mrs. Clarke, as

her sister came into her room, faint and trembling.

“I heard that Allan was gone away,” replied Ellinor, who thought her sister’s voice sounded strangely, though she was evidently endeavouring to seem as calm as possible. The blinds of the windows were drawn down, so that in the dull evening light Miss Bouverie could not clearly see how Dora looked ; but the cold clamminess of her hand struck her, and there seemed something limp and peculiar in the way that her fingers rested heavily in her own palm. She thought there was a death-like feel in the touch of that cold hand.

“Yes, I think my husband has gone away,” replied Dora, as she sat down and clasped her hands together. “I do not know exactly where he is.”

“Did he not say anything to you of his going from home ?” asked Ellinor.

“No, nothing ; he told me nothing ; so that whatever has occurred I am not to blame. No person need come here trying to find out anything from me, as I am quite as much in the dark as anybody myself.”

Dora spoke hurriedly, and was evidently

deeply agitated, yet her sister did not think her agitation proceeded altogether from anxiety about her husband. There was an abstraction in her manner that struck Ellinor as remarkable; and as the latter became accustomed to the dim light of the apartment she observed that Dora's eyes sometimes appeared to be fixed with a strangely vacant look at some particular part of the room, as if her thoughts were wandering far away to other scenes than the present one.

"Do you think it is likely that any accident could have happened to Mr. Clarke?" asked Ellinor.

"It is by no means unlikely; but I scarcely like talking on the subject: it is not a pleasant one in whatever light we regard it."

"Certainly it is not," replied Miss Bouverie; and then there was a short silence of an embarrassing nature to both.

"Will you stay with me for the rest of the evening, Ellinor?" asked Dora after a pause.

"I should be glad to do so, but I fear I could not venture to leave papa alone. He would miss me so much."

"Oh, I forgot papa. How is he? The time was when he did not care for the company of either of us. What a blighted life mine has been, Ellinor! I have had misery enough to excuse anything I might be tempted to do!"

"Could not you come and stay with us at Evergreen?" inquired Ellinor. "That would be a much better arrangement than for me to stay here."

"No; I shall not leave this house till I leave it altogether," replied Dora.

"But you surely do not think that you will have to leave it?" said Ellinor in surprise.

"I may have, and I should prefer not going till I shall be certain of never returning."

"It seems to me as if there were something very strange in all this," declared Ellinor, who felt bewildered. "Tell me truly, Dora, what you think of Allan's disappearance?"

"I think nothing, except that he may not return again, and that I may have to quit this abode of misery and horror."

"What can have happened!" said Ellinor, looking in wonder at her sister. "What misery and horror do you allude to?"

"Such utter misery and torture as no one ever endured but myself!" exclaimed Dora, as she rose and walked about the room in excitement. "Such misery, that if I were sentenced to die this night I should not regret it!"

Ellinor was at a loss what to reply. It almost seemed to her that her sister was not quite in possession of her senses.

"Is it true that Abraham Barr was speaking to you here on Tuesday evening?" she asked, after a pause.

"Who said anything of that?" inquired Dora, hastily and angrily. "Who dared to mention what I chose to do? I will answer no such questions."

"But there may be some inquiry if there is a suspicion of any danger or foul play," said Ellinor, who was very pale. "Do you not think that there should be a search made if your husband is not heard of very soon?"

"Why should there be any search? What good could it do? If he is dead, a search

could not bring him to life again ; and if he is alive there will be little use in looking for him."

"But you must be aware that the whole affair is most extraordinary and mysterious," said Ellinor, looking steadily at her sister. "People might entertain the very darkest suspicions if everything were not done to throw some light upon the matter."

"Suspicious of whom and what?" asked Dora, with a dark light in her eyes, which seemed to have changed their colour from blue to black, as she fixed them defiantly on Ellinor's pale face.

"Suspicious of people who may or may not be innocent," said Miss Bouverie, trying to speak firmly.

"I do not care what is thought or said," declared Dora, stamping her foot impatiently on the ground.

"And is it possible, my sister, that you do not feel any real interest or anxiety about your husband's fate? Are you satisfied to sit still and suffer nothing, while he is thus unheard of?"

"Do I look as if I were sitting still and suffering nothing?" asked Dora, bitterly.

"I am sorry I have offended you, Dora," said Ellinor, kindly ; "but I think at such a time as this we should not waste our time in saying bitter things to each other ; you must know that I cannot help feeling for you. Even if I had no affection for you, I could not forget that our interests are identical. Whatever trouble or difficulty you may be placed in, must affect your near relations almost, if not altogether, as much as yourself."

"And, therefore, for selfish reasons you will sympathise with me. But so much talking bewilders and distracts me. The evening is already setting in ; you need not spend much more time with me, Ellinor, if you are in a hurry to go home."

"Oh, I am not in such haste as all that," said Miss Bouverie, good-humouredly. "I wish extremely that you would let me stay with you to-night."

"No, not now. It is better for me to be alone ; so let that subject be dropped."

The shadows of the autumn evening were, indeed, advancing rapidly. In that darkened room, with the blinds drawn down, it seemed as if the evening had already come.

"Can I do anything for you, Dora—can I be of any use whatever to you?" asked Ellinor, after she and her sister had sat in silence for some minutes.

"No, you can do nothing for me, except leave me in peace," answered Dora.

"Yet, let me ask you one question. Have you any idea of where your husband might be, or what could have happened to him?"

"Ellinor, what can you mean by asking such a question?" said Dora, impatiently.

"Yet you have not answered it," replied Ellinor, quietly.

"And I will not answer it," continued Dora, haughtily. "What I said to you before this, should have been enough to satisfy you, without making any further inquiries upon that point."

Still Ellinor did not feel satisfied, though she knew she must leave her sister and go home. She was her father's companion and attendant, the only comfort he had at this time, and she could not hastily make up her mind to leave him for many hours, knowing as she did how precarious was his state of health; yet she would have remained with Dora for that night, if the latter had permitted her to do so.

The sisters parted with uncomfortable feel-

ings upon both sides, and Miss Bouverie was once again passing over the muddy streets and roads.

When Ellinor left her Dora remained for some time in reflection.

"Could she suspect anything?" she thought, as she paced the large room restlessly. "Could she possibly dream even of a part of the truth?"

A blast of wind, sweeping drearily by, rattled the windows in their frames, and, looking out of the one which commanded the view of the east end of the house, Dora gazed with a shudder at the scene without. The river rolling by, within a short distance, looked black and muddy, and very turbulent, and the sound of its unsettled waters could be heard with a never-ceasing plash as they rushed along.

"Oh, what an awful destiny has mine been!" she thought, as she turned despairingly from the view she had been contemplating for a few moments. "No matter what happens to me in the future, can I ever in my life, let it be long or short, forget the horror I feel now?"

Another blast of wind, with a sound like a wail and a cry of lament, rattled the windows again, but she looked out no more. Pressing her hands upon her forehead, she uttered a moan of anguish most bitter.

CHAPTER XVI.

MR. AND MRS. DOZYHEAD.

It was soon known everywhere within a range of ten miles round Norham that the barrack-master was missing from his post, and everyone was filled with wonder. Where could he be? What could have happened to him?

Days and weeks passed by, and still there were no tidings of him, dead or alive.

Being a public man, it became a public duty to inquire about him; but no one either could or would throw any light upon the matter. His servants, as well as his wife, declared that he had been last seen in perfect health on a Tuesday evening, at his own house, where he had dined, but that after eight o'clock upon that evening no more of him was known. The servants had not heard him leave the house that evening: he might have done so without their knowing it, but none of them remembered to have noticed his going out after dinner. The man who

generally opened the hall-door recollected one or two letters arriving at the house upon that evening, and also some coming on the morning of Tuesday. Whatever those letters contained, they were not to be found now. Mrs. Clarke stated that she had dined, as usual, with her husband on Tuesday, but that he had not been seen by her after eight o'clock that evening.

During all this time Mrs. Barr was in a state of extreme misery and uneasiness—filled with apprehensions of the gravest sort. Abraham was restless and anxious, but he said very little respecting the disappearance of Mr. Clarke. Neither did his wife speak much; she was busy forming plans for the future.

Mr. Trydell, having accepted the offer of the living of Compton Beckworth, was thinking of going from Norham; he had not yet received Ellinor Bouverie's answer to his proposal for her hand. At the present time he could scarcely expect to hear from her on such a subject; yet he did not augur well from her silence. He had never been really hopeful of success in this venture, but he knew that his happiness was altogether concerned in it, and he had not shrunk at the last from speaking openly on the subject to

her father. Better to have all hopes, all doubts at an end, than to live on thinking that perhaps he might have succeeded, if he had only tried. If he failed now, he could, at least, suffer no self-reproach for having been wanting in courage to try his fate.

Lord Halesby's family had been at Halesby Park for some time, and they were there still—all but young Mr. Lyon, who was considered to be travelling abroad, and whose absence from the neighbourhood of Norham caused Miss Barnard some anxiety. She did not display her uneasiness in any very perceptible manner, however, for she was as gentle and placid as ever, and as smiling to such of her acquaintances as were worth her smiles.

Some little changes had taken place latterly at Norham, which we must not omit to notice—such as the marriage of Miss Skinner to Mr. Dozyhead, who it may be remembered was little better than half-witted, but whose income was considerable, and the consequent elevation of the lady from the most absurd and ignominious spinsterhood to quite a distinguished position as a married woman of some note, whose name would appear among the list of patronesses who were asked to

countenance public balls or bazaars in the county, and who would be led in to dinners and suppers long before several ladies who had been wont to laugh at her in bygone days. And was she not determined to make the most of the bargain she had made? Verily she was; and she possibly made a vow to visit the sins of former enemies with a heavy vengeance, in the way of turning their late scorn and contempt into envy and bitter jealousy. In that singular way which so often occurs under similar circumstances, the gentleman who had thus exalted the former Miss Skinner now faded quite away into a dim obscurity. In his bachelor days, and particularly while he was latterly paying court to his bride-elect, the good people of Norham never ceased to speak ill of him, and comment upon his faults and failings; but almost as soon as the marriage was over he glided out of people's memories. The bride who flaunted about in such expensive dresses, with such costly ornaments surrounding her, and who looked the very most sourfaced, scowling bride that was ever seen, became the wonder of everybody. Formerly, when Miss Skinner looked cross, people said she was discontented

because she was not married. Now, when she looked crosser than ever she had looked in her life before, they merely said what a disagreeable countenance she had. They did not sneer at her near so much now as in those days prior to her having become the wife of a crack-brained, immoral man. She was Mrs. Dozyhead now, and she was not as ridiculous as when only the elderly Miss Skinner, whose number of gowns everyone knew, in spite of ingenious changes of trimmings, and who was rapidly approaching old maidenhood. People were proud to say that they had been calling on Mrs. Dozyhead, and that they had seen her dressed in such a way, with this sort of material for a gown, or that sort of ornament adorning her costume. When her carriage, which was brighter and newer than any carriage within forty miles of Norham, stopped at a shop in the town, or drove through the streets, everyone stared and gaped at it; and, although the envious might sneer at the brilliancy of the equipage, and pretend to despise it, there was a good deal of sham in their expressed contempt.

The numbers of people that Mrs. Dozyhead kept waiting for weeks and months before she

condescended to return their visits, and those whom she cut altogether, owing to some direful offence, such as having left her and her sister out of the invitations issued in former days for a ball or other *fete*, were mortified sorely; for Mrs. Dozyhead had it in her power now to give balls and dinner parties herself, and consequently she was a person to be fawned upon and courted. Her mother and sister could talk of nothing but her and her belongings. Whenever anybody visited them, Mrs. Dozyhead's name was sure to come into the conversation about five minutes after they had been seated in the drawing-room. They were always just going to Dozyhead Hall, or had just come from it, or Mrs. Dozyhead had just been visiting them. Mrs. Skinner had grown quite brisk of late, and was, no doubt, thanking her stars devoutly that the time was past when she was obliged to drive ten and fifteen miles on a winter night to a distant ball in order to matronise her daughters, according to a wise etiquette. Her elder daughter, having married a simpleton, was raised to the dignity of being qualified to matronise her sister, and thus the poor old mother, after several hardworking

years, was enabled to rest in peace, with no more anxiety about turbans or dress-caps, or aching, rheumatic joints.

Mrs. Dozyhead and young Mrs. Clarke had clashed a good deal in their early married life, though there was a great difference between them, and if the latter ever thought at all about the former, it was with a sort of wonder and pity. I do not think that, even to gratify anger and spite, Dora Bouverie would ever have degraded herself so far as to marry the man Miss Skinner accepted as a husband. Yet, still the young women clashed, being brides of nearly the same standing. Mrs. Clarke's beauty and sweet expression of face—for it was a sweet expression, whether she was entitled to it or not—formed a strong contrast to the appearance of her rival, and people were apt to make unpleasant comparisons, though everyone knew that in point of wealth and rank and county influence Mrs. Dozyhead was far the superior of the two. A brave woman she had been to accept such a husband, and so raise herself to a point of elevation that she never could have reached without marrying him. How many women

of more squeamish tastes were sinking every day deeper and deeper in the obscurity of single life and poverty, while she soared through existence proud and triumphant!

No one looked with more solemnity and awe at Mrs. Dozyhead than Ellinor Bouverie. She watched her as a sort of marvel among women ; and yet she need not have been so surprised at her, for her own sense might have told her that hundreds and thousands of women had just done the very same thing as she had done long before Mrs. Dozyhead was born, and would, no doubt, continue to do so long after she was dead, unless the position of women were altered from what it was at present, and that some opening was made for the profitable exercise of their talents and capabilities independent of matrimony.

An elderly female relative, who was supposed to understand the world very acutely, had once told Mrs. Dozyhead, while she was still Miss Skinner, and debating in her own mind whether she would accept the proposal of marriage that she had received, that it would be better for her to marry any sort of man, even if she should be obliged to leave him in a week, rather than remain a single

woman, with the prefix of "Miss" to her name when she was advanced in years and wrinkles. "Women, my dear," said this dame, "are really of so little account in the world that as soon as their youth and good looks are over they become a sort of laughingstock and subject for mockery if they are not married. You know that it is only with reference to their being wives and mothers that they are considered anything at all, and, therefore, you had better try and escape from being an old maid when you have a chance of doing so. This is the counsel of a wise old woman who knows the world well."

Miss Skinner was disgusted immeasurably, though she had no doubt her elderly friend was pretty right in what she said, and so she made a desperate resolution to marry Mr. Dozyhead, even though she might be obliged to leave him a week after the wedding.

Jack Skinner, the thriving barrister in London, was rather shocked at the idea of his sister marrying Dozyhead, whom he had always regarded as the very lowest type of human being. But what had Jack ever done for his sisters to advance their prospects in life? Nothing ; nor did he care three farthings what

was to become of them when their mother, with her small annuity, should die. It was easy to marvel at his sister for accepting Dozy-head, who was scarcely ever sober, and to stare wonderingly at her when he came down to Norham to draw up the marriage settlements, insomuch that the blush rose to her cheek; but it was not so easy to point out what better she was to do, or to say how far he would help her in her difficulty.

Like his mother and sisters, he particularly objected to what is termed "Women's Rights" and "independent" women; sharp as he was about his own interests, his brains were rather in a jumble concerning the position of the female sex in this free country of England, and never having studied the subject at all, no doubt, he considered himself perfectly qualified to give a decided opinion against women getting any more rights than they now possess.

Like a great many men, Jack probably had a vague notion that women were to live upon air, and that they were quite indifferent to the goods and comforts of this mortal life.

CHAPTER XVII.

ELLINOR BOUVERIE'S REFLECTIONS UPON SUN-
LRY MATTERS.

ELLINOR BOUVERIE, being a person of a very reflecting turn of mind, was not likely to answer Mr. Trydell's proposal of marriage very hastily. It is easy for one woman to wonder at another for accepting a proposal that may seem unsuitable. It is easy to say, "I should rather break stones on the roadside than marry the man Miss So-and-so accepted;" but, if you think pretty well on the subject, you will find that breaking stones on the roadside is not a very pleasant mode of earning a living. Poverty becomes very wearying and distasteful to those who have experienced it.

Bills coming to the door, when there is no money to pay them; being obliged to live in squalid, unhealthy situations; being unable to procure wholesome food or comfortable clothing, befitting your station; having no means to enable you to secure any of the pleasures of civilised life; no money even to

subscribe to libraries or newspapers; no money to give to the poor, and yet not considered one of the so-called poor yourself, are all hard things to bear, or to contemplate for future endurance.

Miss Bouverie had to consider well and deeply what she ought to do, both for herself and her mother, not forgetting the interest her suitor had in the matter, and what was due to him.

While thinking of these things she knew that her father's days were numbered, and that as he had sunk a great deal of money on his life for an annuity in bygone days, when he probably considered that he was a hale, strong man, likely to live many years, she and her mother would be left in very bad circumstances, indeed, at his death; but this knowledge had nothing to do with her care and anxiety touching his state of health—it had nothing to do with her unremitting attendance upon him, and her sorrow at his evidently failing strength.

It was a solemn time at Evergreen, both upon account of the invalid there and the mystery respecting Dora's husband. Sometimes the most terrible thoughts forced them-

selves into Ellinor's mind about Allan Clarke's disappearance. Her sister's conduct seemed to her extraordinary in the extreme—so extraordinary that she scarcely liked to go to see her, or sit with her; indeed, Dora did not seem to wish her to be with her, or to regard her visits to her as welcome.

There could not be the slightest doubt that a secret of some sort was preying upon Dora's mind. An embarrassing question was always rising to Ellinor's heart, "What message had her sister for Abraham Barr upon the evening that the barrack-master was last seen at his own house?" That was the question which was always puzzling her, and always recurring to her like the sound of a dismal bell. She was aware that a great many strange things had happened in the world—they were happening every day. The newspapers from time to time gave accounts of dark deeds and surprising crimes. Persons guilty of the most fearful acts were to be found occasionally among the educated classes. Satan's temptations were abroad everywhere.

The measure of Ellinor's misery might not be full yet, though it had seemed very large indeed, even up to the present time. She

could scarcely entertain any fixed ideas about anything, yet she occasionally tried to think seriously and practically about what she and her mother were to do in the future, when it should please Providence to call her father away from this world. Sometimes, when her eyes were weary from long night watches, and her heart depressed with sadness, she still pursued the work of trying to make out how her mother and herself were to contrive to live in the future. Her father had dimly hinted at debts and difficulties that seemed endless, besides the debts she knew herself to be owing at Norham to different tradespeople; and, after honourably paying all these debts, what would there be left for Mrs. Bouverie and her daughter to maintain themselves upon? There might possibly be about forty or fifty pounds a year, but certainly nothing more, for their future income, and that would be only obtained perhaps by sinking a few hundreds on their joint lives.

“Anything but dependence on strangers,” thought Ellinor. “Let us be contented with ever so little, and be thankful that we have the prospect of being at least secured from asking charity from any one.”

Forty or fifty pounds a year for two people who were accustomed to move in the rank of gentry would certainly be very limited means. Yet there are many women in the rank of gentry who, though they were, in their father's or husband's lifetime, accustomed to all the comforts and luxuries of life, have not even that much to live upon, when the men upon whom they depended for a subsistence, are snatched away by death. The men and women in novels especially find that money goes but a very short way in forming plans of existence. Sometimes the creatures of the romancist's imagination find it a difficult matter to keep a servant upon two or three hundred a year, and no doubt they would be reduced to starvation on fifty pounds a year; but Ellinor endeavoured to make out to her satisfaction that her mother and herself could live in a small lodging, where they could receive the attendance of a servant, and be able to subsist (of course on very simple fare), all for fifty pounds a year. There would be little money, it is true, for clothes or anything but the very barest necessities of life; there could be no new books purchased, or even procured by subscription to a lending library;

there could be no daily, or even weekly, newspaper, cheap as newspapers were, even in those days, for the very fact that so much information could be obtained for a penny or two-pence, seemed to have exalted those sums of money into an unwonted importance. With all her calculations and her alterations of estimates, and her pruning here and there of what she feared must not be permitted to spread itself on so extended a scale, Miss Bouverie could not allow any margin for what was not absolutely necessary to existence; yet still she was thankful that she was as well off as she was, and that her fate was better than that of many other women who are thrown upon the world friendless and poor, with hands to work, and brains to guide the hands, but no work suitable for them to do, and no one caring whether they died of want, or struggled on, God only knew how.

And then Ellinor asked herself if it might be possible that she should accept Mr. Trydell's proposal if there was not the prospect of that fifty pounds a year for her mother and herself?

In her heart of hearts did she really and truly believe that she would go forth and

earn her bread as a governess, an hospital nurse, a wood engraver (provided she knew how), or a housemaid, or needlewoman, rather than marry a man whom she did not love, but whose position and income would render her, as his wife, respectable in a social point of view, and most comfortable in a domestic way?

If she had an idea that she would ever marry anybody else than Mr. Trydell, it would not seem so strange that she should think of refusing his offer; but she had no such idea; she did not think she would ever marry anyone now. It was an unfortunate thing for her, perhaps that she had fixed her affections upon a person who could henceforth be nothing to her, and who it might have been silly to care for at all; but having given her heart away to that person, she could not get it back again, even if she had wished to do so. Her brother had been the means of blighting her life, and making her feel that her whole future was clouded and dark in prospect. If it was a foolish thing for her to cling still to the memory of that old fancy, then it must be a foolish thing for a woman to have any particular preference for one man above another. If common sense and

worldly wisdom are to be our only guides in these sorts of matters, what is the use of talking or writing as if such a thing as love existed or was expected to exist at all?

Ellinor had always considered that the woman who married merely for gain, and in order to advance her worldly prospects, was a contemptible and reprehensible being; she had heard and read of match-making mothers and fathers being regarded as most odious beings. Satirical writers had always held them up to ridicule and detestation; and no characters in fiction were ever made so absurd, or laughable, or despicable as the portionless single women, who were described with great humour and gusto as trying to catch husbands who would support them. Consequently Miss Bouverie had a horror of those sort of women; for the young readers of light literature are nearly always more or less imbued with the ideas set forth in the works of their favourite authors; and it was only latterly that Ellinor began to find out that though these very witty and humourous writers could cut and thrust so severely at the poor manœuvring husband-seekers, they either could not or would not point out what they were to do, without the

means of getting a provision any other way, when the husband-seeking failed. The very same writers who made the greatest ado about the mercenary feelings of women in their matrimonial speculations were the most averse to any reform being made in the position of women, or to any attempt being made to raise them from their present state of dependence and bondage. It was not only by books that Ellinor was taught to regard matchmaking as little short of a criminal pursuit. The real world seemed to impress her with the idea too. Her own father had such a horror of being thought to want to secure rich husbands, or any husbands at all, for his daughters, that he never entertained any company at Norham, though he might have advanced their prospects by so doing at an expense far short of what he went to in pushing forward his son. A selfish man Captain Bouverie had been as regarded his daughters, though Ellinor would not think so now, when he lay weak and humble on his bed of illness, the tyrant subdued by the strong hand that held him in a grasp of iron, and by the power that seemed to say to his conscience, "You were cruel and unpitying when you were filled

with strength and might, and could tyrannise over those who were weak and under your control; you were contemptuous and filled with pride; you despised those whom you regarded as inferiors, because dependent upon you; and now you are brought low, and yet there is no retaliation on their part. The daughter that you slighted, and whose life you made miserable, is your nurse by day and night; and her step, as she moves through your sombre room, is the most grateful sound you hear, because you know she is your support and trust; you know that in your helplessness she is your only comfort on earth."

Ay, he knew it all; and when she held his wasted hand in her own, that was scarcely less pale and worn, he felt that if anyone or anything in the world could make the solemn journey he was going on seem less terrible or less surrounded with mysterious awe, it would be the clasp of that slight hand and the gentle tones of the voice which was all the music his ears heard now.

It was not her own father alone who, among living people in the real world, made Ellinor Bouverie believe that it was repre-

hensible for a woman to try to raise herself by marriage. Mrs. Dart, Mrs. Sharpont, Lady Halesby—every lady of her acquaintance, almost, expressed the same sentiments. What they had all married for themselves, Heaven knew, but they were very hard on the motives of other women; so that, considering all this, she could not help thinking that it would be very wrong, indeed, to marry merely to preserve herself from want, and she was not one of those individuals who reconcile themselves to doing exactly the very thing they condemn bitterly in others; neither did she suspect that the generality of people acted after that fashion, and that it might be prudent to follow their examples. Her reflections and her reasoning arrived at this point:—If she married Mr. Trydell because she had only the prospect of having the half of fifty pounds a year to live upon, and did not care for him more than as an intellectual and pious friend to whom she had always looked up respectfully and with much esteem, could she regard herself as being any less reprehensible than the women whom she had always heard ridiculed and condemned for marrying for money? What would her motive be for

accepting the clergyman's proposal? Simply this, that she was very badly off, and that the proposal came just at the time when she was puzzled to know how she could live and be maintained in the rank of a gentlewoman. Supposing she had no feeling in the matter herself, of one kind or another, how would her suitor like to receive an answer as to his proposal accepting it, and frankly and truthfully stating her real reasons for doing so in some such terms as these:—"I am flattered at your offer, and have made up my mind to regard it favourably, though I cannot return your love, nor do I believe I ever shall feel any sentiment for you deeper than those of gratitude and esteem; but I shall be left so miserably off at my father's death, which is expected to take place very soon, and my mother will be so utterly devoid of such comforts as I should wish for her, unless something can be done to assist us, that I think it wise and prudent to accept an offer of marriage which has come so opportunely, and which would save me from thinking and planning, and worrying my brain, trying to discover how I may possibly exist at all."

Now, my good readers, if there are any of you who think that Ellinor was foolish to think of rejecting such an eligible proposal as Mr. Trydell's, cease for evermore from condemning any woman whom you may hear or know of as marrying, for nothing but her own advantage. If Ellinor could easily reconcile herself to marrying in order that her mother and herself might be placed in comfortable circumstances, what wonder, then, that other women, whose hearts are set upon securing titles, or high rank, or large fortunes, could marry in the same spirit, with "self interest" as their motto and their watchword?

Sitting up in the long nights of autumn—chilly and shivering from anxiety and want of rest, fearful that the sound of even a heavy breath might awake her father, who rarely now enjoyed an uninterrupted sleep of much duration—Miss Bouverie felt in all its force the bitterness of poverty. Her mother and she lived in the most economical way. Patty lived so, too, and did not grumble or complain. Ignorant and uncouth though she was, she was a great assistance during the daytime

to Ellinor; but, though she offered to sit up at night, Miss Bouverie would not permit it. To be obliged to work hard all day, and get no rest at night, would be to receive worse treatment than a slave; yet Ellinor scarcely allowed herself more than a couple of hours' sleep through the day at this time.

Sitting up at night watching the sick is hard work, and it is a work that ought to be regarded as honourable and praiseworthy; yet it is not a work that is very profitable to the watcher, and for this reason, no doubt, the hired nurse-tender is generally a woman of a low class and much ignorance—a woman who is often past more active employment, and unable to do such work as could show clearly whether she fulfilled her duty or not. Nurse-tenders are not educated, refined women, because they do not get payment suitable for the educated or refined. They have hard, responsible work, but they often skim it over, especially where the danger of the sick is great, and there may be no likelihood of the poor, neglected invalid ever rallying sufficiently to tell how he or she was treated while lying helpless on the dying bed.

Ellinor was a vigilant watcher at her father's couch, both from a sense of duty and affection, so that she made the best of nurses; but human skill could do little to save her father's constitution from the wreck it was becoming. One ailment succeeded another rapidly, and the remedies that were good for one clashed with the treatment of another.

Sometimes at night Miss Bouverie preferred sitting either in her own room or in the drawing-room downstairs, rather than in her father's apartment, lest any movement of hers might awake him if sleeping; and at such times she usually left his door, and the door of whatever room she was in, open, that she might hear quickly if he called her. How inexpressibly lonely the house appeared to her at these periods in the dead of night, with no noise but the ticking of the clock sounding in her ears! Sometimes she employed herself in writing accounts and making up calculations on these dismal nights, and once or twice she wrote fragments of verses.

One night, when she felt particularly sad, with a mysterious and vague feeling filling her heart, she wrote the following lines, sug-

gested by the ceaseless sound of the clock's ticking :—

Move on, move on, thou hoary-headed Time,
 Changeless, ever-changing, pitilessly chime ;
 Minute after minute, noiselessly move on,
 With soft and rapid footsteps, till thou thyself art gone.
 And still, as thou art fleeting, let every added hour
 Bring home to dying mortals thy unrelenting power ;
 That while thy giant shadow o'er all that is is striding,
 The earth and its belongings may hearken to thy chiding.
 Ring, ring the knell of nations, of souls and bodies parting,
 The doom of perished greatness, of dynasties departing ;
 Dispel the bright illusions, the trust in love and truth,
 The bliss that hopeful fancy flings around the life of youth !
 Ay, stealthily tread onwards, and leave thy blighting trace
 On forms that once were upright in all the pride of grace,
 And touch with frosty fingers each lock of gold or jet,
 And wrinkle o'er the features where youth and beauty met :
 Then chill the blood that bounded through every pulse and
 vein,
 And tame each wild emotion of pleasure or of pain ;
 And teach the heart to wonder at lightest thrill of joy,
 Then tremblingly look forward to meet the sure alloy !
 Solemn voice of warning ! How ill can human reason
 Foretell what thou art telling with every passing season !
 That change will come, we know, because it cometh ever ;
 But what that change will bring, to search were vain endeavour.
 'Tis true we know full well *one* change that is before us—
 That *one* appalling moment of agony hangs o'er us.
 But when, and where, and how the doom may be impending,
 Thou, thou alone, canst tell ; upon its dread descending
 We only can conjecture, and wonder what may be.
 The present and the past are ours—the rest belongs to thee—
 The secret of the future, in its mystery sublime,
 Lies hidden in thy marble breast, thou stony-hearted Time !

CHAPTER XVIII.

FOUND AMONG THE SLIME AND WEEDS.

SEARCH was being made for the barrack-master still. Detectives had even come from London, it was said, to see what could be discovered of him. Letters directed to Allan Clarke, Esq., were still arriving at his house; but they were all handed over to his wife, who, if she read them, said nothing of their contents.

Mrs. Clarke did not go out at all at this time; nobody expected that she would. People began to feel certain that her husband was dead. There were no reasons to think otherwise. If he had absconded for any cause, it was surmised that he would have made some sort of preparation for going off. He had not drawn his last quarter's income from his agents in London yet; he had left his affairs in a most unsettled state; no one could imagine any reason for his running away, if he had done so.

The police asked if anyone was known to have a grudge against the barrack-master—if there was anyone who disliked him for any cause? And there were few who liked to answer those questions in the affirmative. The name of Abraham Barr rose to many a lip, but remained unuttered. Nobody liked to get him or herself into trouble about the matter; yet still the police discovered that the upholsterer had reason for particular enmity to Mr. Clarke. They likewise discovered that he had been heard to give utterance to various threats against the ordnance store-keeper; but their knowledge upon these points was all obtained in secret. Of course there was no public investigation—nothing, as yet, but stealthy, noiseless inquiries, and a jotting down of what was gathered for future use. Without anyone knowing it, there were detectives probably hovering now and then up Church Street, and watching with sharp eyes the figure of Barr, as he emerged from his house or went into it.

Lucy hoped it would be yet found out that Mr. Clarke was alive and uninjured, and every day she felt thankful that there was no certainty of any ill having befallen him. As

the time wore on she began to think less of the matter, and to dwell upon her own affairs.

On learning that Mr. Trydell was going to Compton Beckworth, which was near the Priory Farm, belonging to Hammersley's uncle, in Shropshire, she had summoned up courage to tell the clergyman the sad story of the corporal, and to entreat him to intercede with his uncle on the young man's behalf; and Mr. Trydell kindly listened to her words, just before setting out for his new rectory.

One dull evening she was returning from a long walk into the country, where she had gone with some needle-work that had been completed for a customer, who lived two or three miles from Norham; and as she came into the town she became aware that an unusual commotion existed there. People were hurrying to and fro, talking and whispering, and there was a look of excitement upon the countenances of those who passed or met her. She heard some one, who either did not see her or recognise her, say,

“Abraham Barr will have to look to himself now, anyway.”

And then she heard again,

"Well, it's a good thing he was found at last."

Was Mr. Clarke found, then? Thank God if it was indeed so!

No, poor girl, Mr. Clarke was not found. Nothing was found but a lifeless body—a mutilated corpse, already decaying among the slime and weeds where the force of the river had borne it far off from Norham, and cast it on a lonely spot, rough and rocky, where an arm of the sea came creeping in, and the curlews made their nests.

A ghastly sight was that body of the dead man found—so discoloured and disfigured by bruises and rough usage that it was hard to decide anything as to its identity. The eyes staring with a dim fixedness, shocking to see, the features unrecognisable from their swollen, half-decaying aspect, the limbs stiff and shrunken, great wounds on the neck and face. How could anyone say positively that this corpse among the weeds and slime was that of the missing barrack-master?

They could say it was his corpse by the rings on the stiffened fingers, by the pattern of the gold studs in the shirt-front, by the watch in the pocket of the coat, by the coat

itself, by the name on the dead man's linen, "Allan Clarke."

There could be no mistake, no doubt, no question on the subject. The corpse of the man so long missed and wondered about lay a horrible sight in the hands of public authorities, waiting to be examined by medical men and jurymen and the coroner.

As there could be no doubt that it was the body of Mr. Clarke, public curiosity had now only to wonder how the corpse came into the river, and whether the unfortunate man had been murdered and then thrown into the water, or pitched alive in some treacherous manner into it.

When Abraham Barr heard that the body was found, he turned of a ghastly hue, and a shudder passed through his frame—a sort of sudden quiver, as if his nerves had got some great shock of late, and could not well bear any startling news.

"So he was found?" he said, in a gasping way; "found all the way down at Creek Head!"

"Ay, it was far, wasn't it?" asked the man who imparted the information, with a shrewd look at the upholsterer's face; "far, if you

think he was put into the river near Norham, here."

"Yes, very far," replied Abraham, wiping his forehead. "But nobody knows how he got into the water; it's all a mystery, and it's not likely to be solved in a hurry."

"Depend upon it the fellows that are down from London will soon make the business clear. There are few murders committed now-a-days that stand out secret longer than a month or two."

"But why should it be a murder?" asked Barr, looking with a faltering eye at his companion, "why shouldn't it have been an accident?"

"An accident?" repeated the friend, smiling incredulously, "never imagine it was that. As sure as you and I stand here it was a murder of some sort."

And so it was.

CHAPTER XIX.

COMPTON BECKWORTH.

THE rectory of Compton Beckworth was a large, old-fashioned house, quaint and picturesque, standing in tastefully planted grounds. The clergyman who had lately occupied it had a large family, and the voices of children had made the place merry ; but now it seemed a sombre dwelling, silent and solitary, with only the birds to make a movement round it, and no sounds to listen to but the murmur of the wind.

Seeing it for the first time in the late autumn weather—with the trees partly bereft of leaves, and the leaves that remained on them faded and brown ; with the grass on the lawn grown long and wild, and the gravelled walks strewn over with fallen leaves—Mr. Trydell did not think it looked a cheerful place ; but, then, how could it ? With no signs of habitation round it ; no smoke coming up from the high, antique chimneys ;

nothing living to be seen about it but the sparrows that flew out of the great ivy branches clustering round the walls, and the old man who was showing him over the premises.

"It don't look very comfortable just now, sir," said the caretaker, who had acted the part of gardener to the late rector; "but it be a very comfortable, cheersome place when there's people in it, and fires, and life going on about it. It makes a great difference who's in a house and who isn't."

Mr. Trydell smiled.

"Yes, a very great difference," he answered, quietly.

"You'd think, sir, it was the gayest spot in the world when poor Mr. Barton was here, the young people made such a noise, and had such a deal of fun among themselves."

"I shall be here all alone, Matthew," observed Mr. Trydell.

"Only for a while, maybe, sir," replied the old man, looking quizzical. "Such a house as this is no place for a solitary gentleman; it will be wanting a mistress in no time."

A mistress! Would it ever have one while the present rector occupied it? Mr. Trydell

did not smile at the old man's badinage; it was too serious a subject for joking. And yet, how bright that ancient house might become if the mistress whom he had dreamed of for it, and whom perhaps he was dreaming of still, was really to come and preside there, casting a halo of bliss over it and its surroundings!

But if she did not come; if she would write to say that she never could come or make her home there; never be the mistress of any house of his in this world! That was the dark fear that clouded his thoughts, and cast a shadow over everything he was looking at; that made the walls of the parsonage seem so very grey and sombre, and the roof and chimneys so drearily quaint; that made him see no beauty in the copper hues of the old trees, in the silvery line of the little river that wound through the adjacent wood, in the burst of red sunshine that was lighting up the whole scene.

Yet why despair when there was so far no positive reason to do so? No answer of any kind had come yet from Ellinor Bouverie or her father. The latter could not have forgotten or neglected to mention the subject of

his proposal for his daughter's hand to the daughter herself, thought Mr. Trydell, yet wherefore did no answer arrive? It was true that there were strong reasons that might have prevented Miss Bouverie or her father from coming to any decision yet. There were reasons enough to drive the thoughts of many important matters out of their heads altogether; but still the suspense was very hard to bear, and the longer it lasted the more disheartening it grew.

The clergyman would be at Compton Beckworth for ten days, or longer, before he should return to Norham. His cousin and patron, Colonel Barton, had invited him to remain at his house whenever he should come to the neighbourhood, till the parsonage was ready, and put in proper repair for him. He was very kind and considerate; everything seemed favourable and propitious for Mr. Trydell—everything but one—and that, the greatest of all. Willingly would he have relinquished all the rest, if by doing so he could have secured that one—at least so he thought himself—though it was the improved state of his prospects that had induced him to think at all of ever proposing for Ellinor

Bouverie. He had desired Mrs. Barr to forward any letters and papers to Compton Beckworth that might be sent to his old quarters at Norham; and every morning he received communications of some sort by the post; but though he looked anxiously each day, with a beating heart, at the hand-writings directing these missives, his eye did not light upon that of Ellinor Bouverie, which he knew so well, for some days.

"Three letters for you, Trydell," said Colonel Barton, when his cousin entered the drawing-room at the Manor, one morning.

"Ah! thanks," replied the clergyman, with a sinking of the heart, as he drew near the table where the letters lay.

Who does not know the unpleasant feeling of nervousness that occasionally creeps over people when they prepare to look at the superscriptions of newly-arrived letters.

Mr. Trydell felt almost faint as his eye fell upon the hand-writing that had traced his name and address upon one of those missives.

It was that of Ellinor Bouverie.

He dared not open the letter there; he felt inclined to let it remain unopened for ever. His head was giddy,^a his mind for a few

minutes in a state of bewilderment. He tore open the envelopes of the other two letters, and read them like a person in a dream. One was on business relating to the parish work at Norham; the other from Mrs. Barr, which he perused without understanding exactly what he read. It ran thus:—

“ REVEREND AND DEAR SIR,

“ I feel that I cannot stay here any longer—my conscience forbids it. Whatever the world may say of a wife’s duties, my own opinion is that I am right in leaving Norham, where I feel a horror that cannot be described. I go from home this night, and no one will know where I go. Linny comes with me, and we will face the world together. I have long ago told you my sentiments concerning certain plans of conduct. I do not know whether you may approve or disapprove of my leaving Norham in this way, but it would be utterly against my own views and principles of religion to remain in it. You have always been a kind friend to me, and I should be sorry to act contrary to your wishes and advice.

“ With great respect, I am, reverend sir,
your much grieved, humble servant,

“ AGNES BARR.”

"And this is the woman," thought Mr. Trydell, when he had collected his thoughts sufficiently to comprehend the drift of the letter after a second perusal—"this is the woman who thinks women in general should be so obedient and dependent upon the wills of their male friends! This woman, who would keep all others of her sex in the strictest bondage, does not hesitate to run away from her own husband when she finds that the world suspects him of a crime! She does not wait for proof-positive of his guilt. She has but one feeling concerning him—horror—that none other can soften or mitigate."

And now, should he read that third and last letter? Oh! let it be read and understood quickly. Let the worst be known without any more delay.

Tear the envelope open with nervous, hurried hands—with uneven breath—with a feeling as though the sentence of death had been passed, and the moment of execution was at hand—and read—

"MY DEAR MR. TRYDELL,

"It was not from indifference or carelessness that I did not write to you before this

to answer the message that my father gave me from you. Believe me that I have thought very long and deeply upon the subject, feeling fully how much honoured I was by your very favourable opinion of me, because I knew well the value of the heart I had won, and the worth of your whole character; but I knew also that I could make but a poor return for such love as yours, and that if I, from purely selfish motives, agreed to become your wife, you should be a great loser. In the first place, I have no heart to give you; and in the next, the circumstances that surround me would render you most perplexed and unhappy. My family seem plunged in misfortune and difficulties. My brother has, alas! played a sad part in the story of our lives; and from what my sister says I fear she has been left very badly provided for by the sudden and dreadful death of her husband, of which you, no doubt, already know. Upon no side is there any cheering point to make a connection with any of us desirable in a worldly sense. *I* might be a gainer by marrying you, but you would lose everything. Gratitude would be but a poor return for all the love you would waste upon me; and

gratitude and esteem are simply what I could give you for all the wealth of your heart's affection. I would be a miserable woman, knowing that I had no right to accept a particle of such love as yours; and you would soon discover what a mistake you had made in taking such a wife. God knows how often such mistakes are made and bitterly repented of! Yet I would not like to think that we should henceforth be strangers to each other, and that I must lose my valued friend because he wished to honour me so far as was in his power. I have few friends, indeed, as it is, and I should not wish their number to be still fewer. I write in the midst of strange trouble—the words of the Psalmist, written in his bitterest moments of trial, are ever coming uppermost to my mind; so do not regard me unkindly, even though I may pain you by this letter.

“Yours, most truly and obliged,

“ELLINOR BOUVERIE.”

If it had caused the receiver of that letter much pain to read it, it had caused the writer a great deal to write it. Ellinor Bouverie was overwhelmed with many cares and

anxieties when she made up her mind to send that answer to Mr. Trydell's proposal; and yet, in the midst of them all, she had still a separate and distinct feeling of regret for being under the necessity of giving pain to her friend, quite independent of selfish reasons.

Her father was now too ill and near the end of his earthly career to be able to take an interest in anything, and therefore Miss Bouverie never mentioned to him what her decision was respecting Mr. Trydell's offer of marriage. Soon after the day upon which she had dispatched her letter Captain Bouverie was called away from this world. While Mr. Trydell was still detained at Compton Beckworth—either of his own accord absent from Norham, or obliged to remain away on business—although in many ways she felt the loss of his assistance at this time, Ellinor was still glad that he was not in the neighbourhood of Evergreen. She would scarcely have liked to have met him just then. Her grief about her father had expended itself in some degree during the weeks that preceded his death; it had never been a wild, untutored sorrow, but a calm, steady grief, rather upon

his own account, and owing to the sad cause of his illness and death, than from any serious loss that her father's removal from this world would be to herself. No excitement of sorrow could blind her to the true state of the case, or to the fact that her father had never been much to her or her sister as regarded companionship. Some people might probably consider that Miss Bouverie was that very reprehensible, laughable being, yclept "a strong-minded woman;" and certainly she was one, if to possess sufficient discernment to understand truths and facts in a reasonable manner can give a claim to the title. She was strong-minded enough to watch by her father's death-bed up to the last with an untiring fidelity and tenderness; strong-minded enough to look at his remains when they lay cold and dead before her, with a feeling of the deepest pain, and yet to know, as well as she knew in his days of health and strength, that he was a father who had not acted towards his family as a father should have done; strong-minded enough to see things exactly as they were, and to perform all the hard duties that devolved upon her, at this time of death and burial, with an unswerving sense of duty and untiring tenderness.

The discovery of Mr. Clarke's body at Creek Head filled her with intense horror and suffering, and some vague, haunting feelings that rather upset her fortitude; yet still she acted her part bravely through it all.

A coroner's inquest was, of course, held upon the body, but no conclusive decision respecting how it got into the river could be arrived at. There might have been, and perhaps I should say there were, certainly strong suspicions upon the subject, but there was nothing more. The corpse presented in many places a mutilated aspect; there were bruises and signs of rough treatment upon it; but the river had of late been turbulent, and the wild waters that had carried the body down to the spot where it was found might have dashed it in its course against rocks and rough places. So the jury gave a vague verdict, and it was decided that nobody could tell exactly the why and the wherefore of the mysterious and shocking business; yet there were many who thought they knew a good deal about it, and could tell it if they wished.

Ellinor Bouverie heard from her sister that Mr. Clarke had left no will, and that upon investigating his affairs it was found that he

had very little available money, as far as his widow was concerned. There were debts and liabilities that would swallow up the whole of the property that had belonged to the barrack-master.

"What sort of liabilities, Dora?" asked Miss Bouverie.

"Oh, I don't know, I am sure," she replied; "the lawyer who is managing for me knows all about it, and shows me papers that I cannot understand, though I pretend I do, and torments my life out wanting me to take out what he calls letters of administration, though I don't think there are any letters in the case at all—nothing but signing names to different documents, and bothering about what really turns out to be nothing at all to me, though it may benefit the creditors at the expense of my trouble."

"And will you really be so badly off?" asked Ellinor, in much concern.

"Yes, indeed. The marriage turned out but a poor thing for me after all, even in a pecuniary way, as well as—"

Here Dora checked herself, and Ellinor did not speak for some moments.

"You know you can have a pension," she

said at length; "a small one it will be, but still better than nothing. Mr. Clarke's commission in the army as a lieutenant would give you a claim to a small annuity as long as you do not marry again."

"Yes, I know," replied Dora, colouring. "I asked about that when the lawyer mentioned the probability of my getting a pension, and I do not intend to apply for it."

"You are surely not in earnest, Dora? You do not mean to say that you would despise the pension?"

"I did not say that I despised it," returned Dora, looking a little vexed. "I merely observed that I should not apply for it."

"But that seems to me very like despising it," continued Ellinor. "In the present state of your circumstances, of our mother's circumstances, you should not allow any possible addition to your income to be overlooked. Forty pounds a year, though it seems a small thing to speak of, is, after all by no means contemptible. Mamma will have very little more for herself and me to live upon."

"Do not talk to me, Ellinor, upon that subject any more," said Dora, who was now

very pale, with her blue eyes looking darkly, as they generally did when she was deeply moved. "I cannot bear to be—be dictated to—that is, you know, I never liked suggestions or contradictions," she added, in a confused way.

"But it seems so very strange—"

"Ellinor, speak no longer upon the subject. I will not ask for the pension, and that is enough," said Mrs. Clarke, decisively.

"And how do you intend to live?" inquired her sister.

"That question should be followed by the observation that I need not expect any assistance from you or mamma," said Dora.

"You know we have little indeed to spare," remarked Ellinor.

"And what would have been done if I had not been sacrific—married to Mr. Clarke?" asked the young widow, fixing her eyes, so wild and almost black, upon her sister's face, that Ellinor felt quite a thrill of horror creep through her frame as she met the earnest look.

"In that case affairs might have been quite different," said Ellinor, sighing in spite of herself.

"You do not mean to insinuate that my marriage lessened papa's income?" said Dora, provokingly. "You should remember that only for it he would have been deprived of every penny he possessed. I knew well what I was doing when I accepted Mr. Clarke, and how much our poor father owed him."

"But that was not your sole reason for marrying him, Dora?" said Ellinor, sadly.

"It was a very great consideration, I assure you," replied Dora, after a pause. "I think papa would have died long ago if I had refused to accept Mr. Clarke."

"And yet your consenting to do so was not of much avail afterwards," said Ellinor, musingly. "Allan was pressing papa for the money not long since."

"Well, that was not my fault," observed Dora, in a slightly offended tone. "You may be certain, Ellinor, that I did not anticipate that result when I married my husband."

It was generally very painful to Miss Bouverie to visit her sister at this time; Dora seemed so unreasonable and irritable. They were rarely confidential now; yet, of course,

Ellinor could not help trying to find out how Dora's affairs stood. There was something very puzzling to her in the idea that Dora would not apply for the pension which would be now due to her. She had never been particularly proud or shy, and therefore Ellinor could not imagine that it was from any feeling of dislike merely to accepting the government dole that prevented her applying for it. Some mysterious influence was decidedly weighing upon Dora's mind, and guiding her actions at the present time. Surely she could not be already contemplating a second marriage a few weeks after the startling and fearful death of her late husband? Surely she had more feeling than to dream of such a thing?

CHAPTER XX.

ABRAHAM'S CONDUCT COMMENTED UPON.

THE thought of parting with Evergreen Villa, and having an auction of the furniture there, was extremely painful to Ellinor ; yet still it had to be entertained, and she and her mother were obliged to begin preparations for the sale.

Mrs. Bouverie did not like the idea of living in a poor way at Norham. It was her wish to leave the neighbourhood altogether, and reside elsewhere—in some cheap, remote part of the world, where she would not be likely to meet any former acquaintance.

“Let us hide ourselves away from all our old friends,” she said. “I could not bear to feel that I was looked down upon or pitied.”

Ellinor could not well bear the idea of such a thing either, yet still it was a dreary prospect to look forward to—this being hidden away—buried, as it were, in obscurity. She loved Evergreen Villa as most people love the home of their childish years, and she

would have liked to have kept it with all her heart if possible; but where could a fairy wand come from to summon up a good genius who would enable her to retain it? Alas! where?

While the Bouveries were thus planning where they should repair to, Mrs. Barr had put a certain plan of hers into execution.

One night she disappeared from her home, bringing with her her youngest child, Linny, and having informed no person of her intention to leave Norham.

The conviction that her husband had murdered Mr. Clarke had grown stronger and stronger every day, and especially so after the corpse was found at Creek Head. What served to put the climax to her suspicions and fears was one dark fact—that the large stick which Barr had occasionally been in the habit of taking with him when he went out was found on the river's bank, not near Creek Head, but not far from the barracks at Norham.

A youth, who knew the young Barrs, found the stick, and had appropriated it for his own use, when the upholsterer's sons made him aware that it belonged to their father; whereupon it was duly delivered up to them, and taken in triumph to Barr's house, where Mrs.

Barr, who happened to be at home, questioned the boys very closely as to where it had been found. They told her, of course, that it had been found on the bank of the river, and a terrible confirmation of previous suspicions took possession of her mind, freezing her blood as it did so; yet she took the stick in silence from the lads, and put it up into its accustomed place of old, presenting no peculiarity of aspect as she did so, beyond a certain degree of grimness in the expression of her countenance. But that circumstance put the finishing stroke to her long-dreamed-of plans.

One morning when Abraham Barr looked about for his wife, wondering why she had not made her appearance as usual, he found her not.

Lucy was at this time obliged to remain out day and night with the dressmaker who employed her now, and who kept her busy at all hours, as it happened to be a very busy dress-making time at Norham; therefore she was not at home, and the upholsterer had to prepare his own breakfast, and eat it in the company of only his two sons.

When his eye fell upon the large stick standing in its old place he started, and a red shade flitted over his face, but he asked no

questions of the boys respecting it. The sight of it did not improve his appetite, apparently, for he very soon afterwards left off eating.

Where was his wife gone to? Where was Linny? A dark fear shot through his heart, which caused his nerves to thrill, his pulses to beat. Barr had been looking badly for a long while; now he looked worse than ever. There were people who wondered that he did not leave Norham and the neighbourhood—that he did not fly to distant regions while he was still free from the grasp of the law. How shameless and barefaced he was, they thought, to remain on in the town, even if he had no regard for his own safety.

“I never liked the look of Barr’s countenance,” said Joe Horrocks, who kept a small grocer’s shop in Church Street. “Them eyes of his always used to send a sort of shock through me.”

“Yes, they were uncommon strange eyes; being different in colour, too, was odd—very odd,” said the individual addressed.

“Of course, he couldn’t help that,” returned Horrocks, who piqued himself a good deal upon his sense and the strength of his reasoning powers; “a man ain’t altogether

accountable for the colour or shape of his eyes, or his nose, for the matter of that, Tom."

Horrocks, nevertheless, was a little accountable for the colour of his own nose, inasmuch as it was a very purple one, owing to his rather overabundant indulgence in spirituous liquors.

"No, Mr. Horrocks, they are not indeed, responsible for them things," observed Tom, who, being of a rank inferior to that of the grocer, was obliged to consider the latter the wiser man of the two—at least to make a feint of so doing; "but don't you think the Almighty puts odd features on a man's face when he intends him for a great criminal?"

The fact of Tom Shelby being only a gentleman's groom made Horrocks very doubtful about agreeing to much that he suggested, even when the suggestions were reasonable—which, to tell the truth, they were not very often. In the present instance the grocer looked somewhat scornful, and tried to remember all the good-looking criminals he remembered to have heard of. They were, unhappily, not a few, and he brought up some instances of handsome culprits, murderers, and forgers as the case might be, till Tom was confounded and crushed.

"Then maybe Abraham Barr wasn't such a criminal after all, if it goes by good looks that way," said Shelby, venturing upon a hazardous suggestion.

"You don't understand the case," said Horrocks, with a look of contempt; "there's no rule without an exception, and exception makes the rule."

"Does it, indeed?" inquired Tom; "then it ought to be called the exception instead of the rule."

"It's easy to see you haven't got much knowledge, Tom," said the grocer; "if I make up a packet of sugar, it doesn't stand to sense that I'm sugar, eh?"

"Certainly not," said Tom; "whatever you are, you ain't *that*."

"So, that, logically speaking," continued Horrocks, "though Abraham Barr is a very ordinary looking man—"

"I don't think him an ordinary-looking man, Mr. Horrocks," interrupted Tom; "I don't believe I ever saw anybody like him, taking into account the black and blue eye."

"Ordinary means plain, ugly," said the grocer.

"I thought it meant common—what you might see everyday and everywhere."

"Not at all. You certainly would not see the like of Barr anywhere, and yet he is, decidedly ordinary. He has a forbidding countenance that does not bode good to any one that has a knowledge of physiognomy."

"How strange it is that he don't run away while he can," said Shelby, musingly. "If I committed a murder, which God forbid, I'm sure I wouldn't stay on in the very spot where it occurred till proofs turned up of the crime and got me hanged."

"You see there's an infatuation about some people," returned Horrocks, "an infatuation that leads them to their doom, just as we see the moths flying towards their destruction in the form of a candle."

"Barr was a man who always held his head too high, and may be in the end it will be higher still than ever it was before."

Was the upholsterer indeed the murderer of Mr. Clarke, and if so, why did he not follow his wife's example, and decamp from Norham? What was keeping him there, in a place where he might at any time be convicted of the crime—a place where he never could expect again the countenance or patronage of respectable people?

CHAPTER XXI.

A SURPRISING MESSAGE.

MISS BOUVERIE was just completing the arrangements for the sale of the furniture at Evergreen. She had helped to make an inventory of all the articles the house contained, and had tried to crush many a feeling of sorrow as she did so. There were several things that she would have liked to keep among those old-fashioned bits of furniture, valueless as they might have seemed in the eyes of anyone else. Some things she determined not to part with, but they were small articles that could be easily carried from place to place—all the larger, heavier pieces of furniture must be sold at once.

Patty, though she knew she was about to be parted with by Mrs. Bouverie, worked for her with might and main, with all that strange fidelity which is so often found among the lowly towards those of higher rank—among slaves for their rulers, even when those rulers may be tyrants.

Patty had cried when she saw her late master's coffin leave the house, as if he had been the kindest, least overbearing of men. What wonder, then, that she entertained a feeling of devotion towards Miss Bouverie, who had never said an unkind word to her?

Many a tear this servant shed as she polished chairs and tables—many a sigh she heaved as she watched Miss Bouverie's sad face during this preparation for the auction. Yet she could not afford to make such a sacrifice as we hear of sometimes among the domestics of reduced people (especially in works of fiction); she could not afford to offer to go and serve Mrs. Bouverie and her daughter without wages, and move through life in future, regardless of raiment or any reward for the toil of servitude, beyond the happiness of being in the kitchen of her former mistresses, and being ordered to do their bidding in the matter of cooking their chops and steaks, and so forth.

She was grieved, indeed, to part with them, but she, nevertheless, was looking out for a new situation, as hard as she could, ever since Ellinor had told her that she could not accompany her and her mother from Norham.

The Bouveries had decided upon going to London for a little while before settling finally anywhere; they would be lost in the great human mass there, and be likely to pass unnoticed more than in a smaller place.

Ellinor knew little of the great metropolis; since she was a child she had not been there, and her recollection of it was not very clear. She had made some ineffectual attempts to induce her sister to accompany her and her mother to London, but Dora seemed strangely obstinate and unwilling to attend to any suggestions of hers; she was looking more and more ill and worn, without a trace of her former bright colour, and she did not appear to have determined where she should go to, or whether she should remain at Norham.

Mrs. Bouverie had not yet fixed upon a day for going to London, chiefly owing to Dora's unwillingness to accompany her.

Mrs. Clarke had been shrewd enough in examining into her late husband's affairs, for, somehow, people generally very soon grow quick-witted upon the subject of money; she had not asked her sister's advice upon any subject concerning the business matters she

was engaged in, and she had requested her never to allude to Mr. Clarke's fearful death. Indeed, that was a subject scarcely ever touched upon by any of the family at this time.

Patty was, one morning, busy in the midst of the cleaning and scrubbing of the furniture at Evergreen, some of which stood outside the house, at that early hour, when she was a little started by a horseman hurrying up the avenue, at such speed that she was nearly trampled under the horse's hoofs. The rider wore a livery suit, which Patty recognised quickly as that of the Halesby family.

"You're taking an early ride," she said, a little shortly, as the man drew up before the hall-door.

"Yes; my lady is ill, and wishes to see Miss Bouverie, if she can possibly go to her," he replied.

"It's long enough since your lady was this side," observed Patty, still curtly, for somehow she knew by instinct, and not from listening at the keyhole, that Lady Halesby had quarrelled with her young ladies during that last unhappy visit they had paid at the Park.

"I am afraid it will be long before her ladyship is out anywhere again," observed the man.

"Why? What has happened to her?"

"She got an attack of some kind last night, and she's a good deal in danger."

"And what good can Miss Bouverie do her? She ain't a doctor," said Patty, who went on polishing.

"I don't know, I am sure," returned the horseman; "I'm only aware that her ladyship has ordered a carriage to follow me in about half an hour to take Miss Bouverie to Halesby."

"Miss Bouverie ain't always to be had at everybody's beck, I can tell you," said Patty. "Your lady might have waited to see if she'd be willing to drive seven miles on a raw morning like this before taking the trouble to send a carriage for her."

"Here's a note for Miss Bouverie. Please give it quick to her," said the man, impatiently.

"How do you think she is up yet?" demanded Patty, who knew very well that the young lady was out of bed hours ago, and working in the garden, taking up a few flower-roots.

"I shall have to fling the note on the gravel if you do not take it," declared the Halesby messenger, who was getting extremely irritable.

Patty would have another obstinate polishing dash at the chair, which she was brightening up before condescending to take the missive from the man who was not, after all, in the least like the traditional nobleman's servant, being a rather quiet, usually obliging individual, without any symptom of superciliousness about him whatever.

Ellinor was sadly taking up some favourite flower-roots, and wondering where she should get a garden elsewhere in the future to sow and plant in, when Patty came sulkily forward with the Halesby note in her hand.

"It is well I consented to bring this to you, Miss Ellinor," she said, giving it into the young lady's hand.

"What is it?" asked Miss Bouverie.

"Some note from Lady Halesby's family," replied Patty.

Ellinor started up, and coloured very much. Neither Patty nor she had forgotten that no carriage from Halesby had followed Captain Bouverie's remains to the grave, so short a

time before, and it had mortified both exceedingly, though they never mentioned the grievance to each other. Indeed, after what had occurred, it was unreasonable of Ellinor to expect that the Halesby's would pay any attention to her family, yet it did seem to mark the line that had been drawn to separate them more distinctly, this want of attention on their part concerning her father's funeral.

"Will you go, miss?" asked Patty, as Miss Bouverie read the note.

"Why, I must, I suppose," replied Ellinor, whose hands were trembling as she held the note.

"Humph," said Patty.

The note was from Lady Halesby's own maid, and contained a request that Miss Bouverie would repair to Halesby without delay, as her ladyship was dangerously ill, and wished much to see her.

Had Lady Halesby been a poor woman, Ellinor would not have hesitated to go to her at once, even after ever so great an offence; but as she was a viscountess, with wealth and rank to support her, she felt some reluctance to attend her summons.

It seemed like taking a sort of liberty to

ask her thus to go to Halesby after the events that had occurred during her last stay there. What could Lady Halesby want with her now, after insulting her as she had done?

However, Ellinor Bouverie was by no means an unforgiving person, and she would endeavour to banish the unpleasant feelings that were striving to rise up in her mind. She put on her cloak and bonnet quickly, and was just ready to leave the house when the carriage from Halesby arrived.

A great many ideas crowded through her brain as she drove along the well-known road to the Park. How often she had gone over the same ground since childhood, and how happy she had always been in former years to be conveyed there in the great Halesby carriage, which had seemed such a charming equipage! She thought of that. The horses trotted, and sometimes even galloped swiftly, so great was the anxiety of the coachman to lose no time.

Ellinor, as was natural, felt a nervous sinking of the heart as the gateway, so long familiar, was reached, and when she beheld the gatelodge where she had seemed to receive the sentence of doom on that never for-

gotten day which still lived vividly in her memory.

Ellinor could scarcely stand firm when she got out of the vehicle, and it was with a confused brain that she watched servants coming towards her with a hurried, and yet extremely respectful air, to show her into the house. She scarcely knew what she was saying to them, or what they were saying to her, as she entered the great hall, but she managed to inquire for Lady Halesby in the proper terms, though she did not quite understand the answer.

“I must tell her ladyship that you are come before you go to her,” said the waiting woman, “that she may not receive too much of a shock,” and so she preceded Miss Bouverie up the wide stairs.

CHAPTER XXII.

ONCE AGAIN AT HALESBY.

ELLINOR had been told how Lady Halesby was affected, but she had not taken the information in, except in a confused disjointed way. She was just able to gather from what she comprehended of the lady's-maid's account, that her ladyship had been suddenly seized with an attack of paralysis, after getting a letter the day before stating that young Mr. Lyon was very ill at Rome, and scarcely expected to recover.

"My lord set off at once for Italy," said the maid, "and after he was gone some hours her ladyship took ill."

"Indeed?" replied Ellinor, mechanically.

"Yes, ma'am—it was quite a sudden thing; and when we asked my lady if she would like us to send for any person besides her physician, she desired us to write for you, ma'am, which we were glad to do, it being unpleasant for us all to be here without some one to direct us besides the establishment."

Miss Bouverie was now at the door of Lady Halesby's chamber, which was a good deal darkened, with the morning light partly excluded, leaving the room in sombre shadow.

Ellinor entered softly, and seemed to comprehend at once the real state of the case.

She stood within a sick room, and the person ill and suffering was Lady Halesby.

"This is Miss Bouverie, my lady," said the maid, bending over the bed where the invalid lay.

"I am glad of it," answered the latter, in a trembling voice, very unlike the tone of former days.

"I am sorry to find you ill," said Ellinor, kindly, forgetting immediately all her late causes of annoyance and vexation when she saw the mistress of Halesby so prostrated.

"Yes, I am very ill; suddenly struck down when apparently in perfect health. Some alarming news—but it pains me to speak. Wilson, you may leave me alone with Miss Bouverie for some time, now," said Lady Halesby, somewhat feebly.

The waiting-woman then withdrew, and Ellinor was alone with the invalid, who was holding her hand ever since she first took it upon her entrance.

“I have been very rude and unkind to you, my dear,” said Lady Halesby, speaking slowly and with difficulty, “But I trust that you will forgive me; indeed, I ought to be certain you would, from what I know of your disposition and principles.”

Here the speaker paused for a few minutes, as though exhausted, but she soon resumed:—

“You know, I daresay, my dear Ellinor—for you must permit me to call you as I used in old times—you must know what a very high opinion I entertained of you before that unhappy discovery of your brother’s dishonourable conduct. I thought you, even in early childhood, the best and sweetest of beings, and when you grew up you seemed to fulfil quite the promise of those years. I heard of your kindness to the poor through many ways, and although you did not speak at all of your own good works, I knew much more of your acts than you were aware. For many years of my life I have considered that true piety and good principles were far more precious than all the wealth and influence that the world can bestow; but perhaps I have been too severe in my views, not lenient enough towards those who are of frail natures,

and unable to fulfil my idea of what is just and right. I feel this now, particularly when weakness of body has prostrated me so suddenly here, with the powers of my limbs gone all in a few moments, and my life in a precarious state; and so I am anxious to ask you to pardon my late unkindness, and to let me think that it is possible for me to be your friend once more."

With tears in her eyes, Ellinor took the hand which Lady Halesby extended towards her, and gave it a gentle pressure; but she could not utter a word.

"Yesterday," resumed Lady Halesby, "a letter reached me stating that my dear son was dangerously, almost hopelessly ill from a low fever at Rome. The physician who wrote said that he had been ailing for some months previously, and that this fever is the result of some great mental or bodily prostration. I knew that Gerard was not well when he left this to travel, and I hoped that change of air and scene would restore him to health; but it was not to be, and I have great doubts of his recovery. Think of it, Ellinor, my only child, the hope of my life, stricken down, perhaps never to rise up again! Is it

any wonder that I have been stricken too by hearing such news?—stricken down when I would fly if I could to watch him, and sit by his bed night and day!—stricken down, so that I can scarcely stir hand or foot when I most wish to be active, and hurrying to my beloved child, who is in a foreign land! Don't you pity me, Ellinor? Don't you think I am sorely tried and punished for all I have ever said or done that was wrong or unkind?" and the woman usually so stern and unbending began to weep in a piteous manner. It always seems sad to see an habitually hard, severe person brought so low as to shed tears, and yet, perhaps, their weeping does not cost them more than those suffer who are oftener moved to tears. To Ellinor it was very painful indeed to see this poor mother convulsed with grief, and her own tears fell very fast, though she was not yet thinking of anything beyond Lady Halesby's affliction and suffering of mind and body.

"My God, how humble we should be!" cried the invalid, clasping her hands and looking upwards—"humble in all our acts and thoughts, humble in our piety, and in our looking to the Almighty, whose power is

so great! Am I not a poor worm now, poorer than the lowest servant in my own establishment? Ellinor, my dear child, I would give thousands of pounds this moment if by doing so I could be raised up from this bed, and rendered fit to travel to my son!"

"You must not excite yourself in this way, my dear Lady Halesby," said Ellinor, who was alarmed at the grief of her friend, which was rapidly growing wilder. "You must be calmer, and put your trust in God, who can raise up your son if He thinks fit, and raise up yourself also. There is no need to despair."

"Yes, yes; I do despair!" exclaimed Lady Halesby. "Nothing but a miracle could raise me up in time to fly to my son as soon as I wish. If he dies, Ellinor—oh, if he dies, I shall be a miserable woman for life! Don't speak; there is no use in reasoning with me. I have more to prey on my mind than you can know—more remorse, more bitter thoughts to set me frantic. You know what a son mine was. I say was, for he is very likely mine no longer; you know that he was my only earthly treasure that I valued. God knew what an idol he was to me, and from

his infancy upwards I determined within my own heart, that I would never try to thwart him in whatever he might wish to do that was right and honourable ; above all, I resolved that if he wished to marry a really good woman, provided she was a gentlewoman, that he should do as he pleased, and I would never interfere, even if she was without fortune or any influential connection. My prayer was that he might be a happy man to the end of his life on earth and a good Christian, fit for God's kingdom hereafter. I did not dream of his dying long before myself. I thought he would live to inherit these lands, and my own property, and that Halesby would remain in the family instead of going to a distant cousin, as it may. But what of that? What of worldly matters at a time like this? My great source of misery, Ellinor, is, that I have killed my son by my own treatment. I think I have killed him as surely as if I had administered to him a dose of poison!"

Miss Bouverie began to fear that Lady Halesby's senses were wandering, and she would have softly withdrawn from the bedside, had not her friend held her hand in

such a firm grasp that she could not move away.

"Do not leave me," said Lady Halesby ; "I must speak to you, and you surely will not refuse to hear me."

"Certainly not," replied Ellinor ; "but I fear to weary you ; I do not like to see you so excited and unhappy."

"Can you wonder at my wretchedness ? Can you wonder that I wish to unburthen my heart to a friend—to speak of my dear child to a person that I think valued him, and understood his high nature ?"

"I do not wonder at your wishing to talk of him, but I dread the effects of such excitement upon your own health. As to myself, I could sit here all day without feeling tired ; and you are right in believing I valued your son's character, for I did so most truly. Every one who knew him did, and this must be a great consolation to you now. Had he been an unprincipled person, careless of religion, what misery his friends must suffer now in reflecting upon his state !"

"Ah, but I am not reconciled to lose him !" exclaimed the mother, clasping her hands. "I am not willing to let him go

from me as he is going through my own doing. It was *I* who persuaded him to travel abroad; it was *I* who sent him far from me, hoping to make him forget something that I wished to drive from his mind. Do you know what I mean, Ellinor? You do know. You must know!"

"I cannot be sure, Lady Halesby," said Ellinor, whose colour rose, casting a deep red glow over her face; yet she was too truthful to answer otherwise, for she had a suspicion of what Gerard's mother meant.

"Ah! you may be sure your surmise is correct. Why should we not understand each other fully? You know that my son admired you. You know that he loved you, even though he may never have said so to you in direct words."

"It was too much to believe," said Ellinor. "Even if I had ever thought so, Lady Halesby, I felt that I could not aspire to such distinction. I knew he was a person who would expect a great deal from anyone who—"

She stopped here, not knowing how to finish the sentence.

"Whatever qualities he expected or wished to find in the person he dreamed of for a wife, he found in yourself, Ellinor, and I believe

that I found them, too. In fact, I encouraged him to think highly of you, and did what I could to throw you as much together under this roof as I possibly could ; yet, do not for a moment suppose that I should countenance, under any circumstances, such a thing as match-making, which has always been my particular aversion. I mean that I did not do anything to discourage Gerard from thinking of you. I always said truly what I thought of you, and it pleased me when I heard him speak highly of you himself. At the same time I had no idea that he was as deeply attached to you as I find to be the case."

Ellinor stood listening to all that Lady Halesby was saying in a dreamy state that made her think she was scarcely hearing such words in reality. Was there not something visionary and unreal about what she was both seeing and hearing ?

"I did not understand the true state of the case," continued Lady Halesby, whose strength did not seem to decrease as she went on speaking. "I knew Gerard admired and valued you extremely, but I did not believe that his feelings towards you were so very

strong as they were when I formed the resolution of breaking off my acquaintance with you and your family. I thought a little variety and the lapse of a few years would completely blot you from his mind, and I told him—forgive me, Ellinor—I told him I would not consent upon any consideration that he should continue to keep up any acquaintance in future with any of your family. He remonstrated with me, saying that you could not possibly be held responsible for the conduct of the rest of your family; that what your father or your brother might do was nothing to you; and that it was unjust and unkind to visit their faults and sins upon you, who were perfectly innocent of wrongdoing. This seems fair enough to me now, but when he uttered such words I was severely angry. I told him I should never receive you or any member of your family at Halesby again; that I wondered he had no more regard for me than to defy my wishes in such a way; and, finally, gave him to understand that I would consider him an ungrateful son if he spoke in future to anyone at Evergreen. He did not say whether he would act in accordance with my wishes or not; but I am sure he did. He remained for

some time in the country, and, as I saw him looking ill and listless, I proposed that he should go to travel in the East, as I was a little uneasy about him. Gerard, you know, my dear Ellinor, was always brought up to regard the fifth commandment strictly: he had never considered that because he was a man he was to be absolved from attending to it, and therefore I have no doubt that he had made up his mind to give you up as far as lay in his power."

I am afraid that Ellinor, in the weakness of her human nature, would have forgiven Gerard Lyon if he had not attended so particularly in that one respect to the fulfilment of his mother's injunctions; but principle told her that it was right for him to do so. How sad it had often made her to think he had thus given her up without a word or any sign to show he had ever cared in the least about her! What mortification and bitterness of heart these wishes of his mother had occasioned her! But oh! how much greater was the bitterness of the mother's own heart!

"But it was a great sacrifice to him to do so, Ellinor, and I should not have required it of him. I never dreamed that it was a sacrifice which might tend to his destruction, and to

my own great misery," continued Lady Halesby as she moaned sadly.

"You acted as you thought best," said Miss Bouverie.

"Yes, in my short-sighted worldly wisdom," returned Lady Halesby.

And then there was a pause in the conversation for some minutes before she again spoke.

"My dear Ellinor," she said, at length, "I know you are not a person who would marry merely for mercenary motives; I have heard your sentiments upon the subject, and I believe you were truthful and sincere in all you said. I ask you solemnly then, if Gerard possibly lived through this dangerous illness, and was restored in God's mercy to his former health, would you feel a sufficient amount of regard for him to accept him for your husband?"

Ellinor did not reply; it was a strange question to ask her, and she scarcely knew how to make a suitable answer.

"Did you ever care about him more than as a cousin and a friend?" demanded Lady Halesby. "Were you never given to understand that you were the chief object of his thoughts and hopes? Speak, Ellinor, I beg of you."

"There was a time when I believed he cared for me," replied Miss Bouverie, "but he never said so in plain terms, and I had begun to think that I had deceived myself in entertaining such an idea."

"Then you would not have rejected him had he asked you to be his wife?"

"He was always one of my dearest friends, since earliest youth," said Ellinor, gently—"one of whom I entertained the highest opinion."

"You are still free, are you not? You have no other attachment; you are not engaged to any one else?" inquired Lady Halesby, anxiously.

Miss Bouverie shook her head, thinking as she did so of the proposal of marriage she had just declined.

"Then if Gerard lives he may have hope of winning you? I know there are many women who would be glad to marry him for his position and fortune; but you are not one of those. Believe me, my dear Ellinor, that you are very dear to him. Think of him as your devoted lover; and forgive me for my mistaken severity."

Having said all this, which was as much

as she required to say, Lady Halesby ceased to speak.

That winter day was a solemn one at Halesby Park. The mistress lying ill and helpless, the heir of the broad lands perhaps dead in a foreign land. What wonder that the wind sighing through the giant trees that rose leafless and bare to the sky, seemed to be wailing mournfully as it swept by on its course.

Ellinor thought of her childish days at Halesby, and of the romances she had formed in her young brain in those old years so long ago. Was not the reality which surrounded her now almost more strange than any of her former flights of fancy? Was there a great destiny still before her, or would this dream-like reality vanish away, and the story of her life remain a disjointed one, ending in nothing, as so many life-tales end, even when they hold out promises of important events and consequences?

Wind of the winter day, sigh on with that mysterious wail that tells nothing of what may be, and yet seems to whisper of strange things in an unknown language.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE BOUVERIES RATHER SURPRISE THEIR
RELATIVES.

WHEN Miss Bouverie went to stay at Halesby for the "some time" she had mentioned in her note to her mother, Patty was by no means disposed to let it appear that she was satisfied at such an arrangement, and when Ellinor came home next day she received her rather coldly. There are no people who look more to the dignity of those they serve than servants, and Patty could not understand how Miss Bouverie could so easily forgive the Halesby family for not having paid due respect to the remains of her father.

Mrs. Bouverie was likewise surprised at her daughter's determination to pass some time at the Park, and a good deal roused out of her usual apathetic state by it.

"And how is it that Lady Halesby wishes for you now when she seemed to have given us all up for many months?" she asked.

"Illness, you know, makes people different

from what they are in health, mamma," said Ellinor.

"Yes; but I did not think Lady Halesby was a person likely to be so capricious as she seems to be now," replied Mrs. Bouverie.

"It is not altogether caprice," remarked Ellinor, "but rather a kind of remorse. You know she was greatly displeased at Dawson's conduct, and then poor papa's letter to her mortified her extremely; but she wishes to forget all that is past, and to renew her old friendship for us."

"It is not so very easy to forget slights and insults," observed Mrs. Bouverie.

"But think of Lady Halesby's kindness to us now, mamma," said Ellinor. "Think of her offering us money to enable us to keep Evergreen, and to save us all the trouble and worry of an auction, giving me a cheque for five hundred pounds, and asking no acknowledgment for it! My dear mother, this is an act that tells of sincerity and real regard for us. It is not a mere matter of words."

Mrs. Bouverie was mute from surprise for a few minutes; at length, without apparent pleasure, but with a slight tremour in her voice, she observed—

"She has plenty of money, I suppose, or

she would not throw it away in that way upon people who are so little to her."

"Mamma, we are not little to her," said Ellinor, impressively; "she is truly sorry for anything she may have done to offend us, and we should not bear ill towards her. If you saw how ill and helpless she is now, you could not help pitying her; you could not grudge the little comfort that my presence may be to her in her sick-room."

"I do not grudge it. I only wonder at her for feeling your presence any comfort to her."

Ellinor wondered if her mother would have felt at all elated if she knew the whole state of the Halesby case, and that it was owing to Gerard Lyon's attachment to herself that his mother was lavishing so much kindness upon them. At present she could not bring herself to reveal this, it was still so uncertain what might occur.

Before setting out again for Halesby, Miss Bouverie was obliged to go to Norham, to get Lady Halesby's cheque cashed at the bank there, and to pay some of the most pressing creditors, whose letters, demanding the money due to them, were arriving at Evergreen continually. It was a great comfort to her to be able to satisfy these impatient

people ; and an hour or two served to set them all at rest. What a triumph it was to be able to put their receipts into her pocket, and to feel that the postman's knock would not in future cause her heart to palpitate, and her spirit to grow faint within her !

She met Mrs. Dart and Mrs. Sharpoint just as she was turning out of the last shop where she had a bill to pay, and of course she had to stop and speak to them.

"I wanted to see you so much, to know if you were going to sell the easy chair that used to be in your poor father's room," said Mrs. Dart, when the first greetings were over, and the usual remarks made upon the weather, "because it is just the very thing I want, and I hope you will desire it to be kept for me."

"I do not think it will be sold," replied Ellinor, in a hesitating sort of way, and blushing a little.

"Oh ! you are going to keep it, I suppose ? That is always the way ; anything I want particularly is always not to be had. But what *can* you want with that chair ? If you are going from Norham it will cost more than it is worth to pay the carriage of it. I always thought it a very clumsy, heavy sort of chair, only fit to be left just stationary."

"Well, I believe it is to be left stationary," replied Ellinor, who could not help smiling a little. "After all, we are not going to move it."

"What? Has somebody taken the house and furniture off your hands already?" demanded Mrs. Dart eagerly, while her eyes sparkled with curiosity.

"No. We are not going to part with the house or furniture just at present; indeed, perhaps, not at all," added Ellinor, in her wish to be perfectly truthful.

"Well, how you do change your minds about everything! I never knew anything like it. Whose caprice is this?"

"There is no caprice in the matter, I assure you, Mrs. Dart," said Ellinor, good-humouredly. "A friend wished us to keep Evergreen and not to leave Norham, and so we are thinking of doing so."

"And who is this great friend, pray? I think I ought to know such a person who can influence you and your mother so much in a very important matter, too. Really, I did not imagine you had any friend like that anywhere at present, unless it might be your sister. Yes, I suppose it is Dora, who is making you alter your minds to

suit her own views; but I can tell you she is not a person fit to lead anyone. That chair would not be of the least use to anyone who did not want it for a sort of sofa as well as a chair. I could have got one at the mart last week, only that I was waiting for your auction; but I never, never will put faith in the intentions of anyone again—never!”

“Oh, you know the Bouveries never knew their own minds,” added Mrs. Sharpoint, decisively. “I found out *that* long ago.”

“Surely you would not have us to sell our house and furniture, Mrs. Dart, because you happened to want some of our tables or chairs?” said Ellinor, still without losing her temper in the least.

“How can you ask such a question, Ellinor,” demanded Mrs. Dart, rather indignantly, “as if I ever dreamed of such a thing! No, but I like people to be consistent, and to know their own minds thoroughly. The Quakers are the right sort of people, who never go back of what they once say—never alter their intentions when once they give utterance to them. Talking of Quakers, do you know that Abraham Barr’s wife has disappeared mysteriously, and the youngest child,

little Linny, that I bought the whistle for one day, and neither father nor mother were at all grateful for it either. People are talking very queerly about the Barrs, and even some go so far as to say Abraham has done something to put his wife out of the way. I believe Lucy has had to give up her situation at Mrs. Camlet's, owing to the suspicions about her father's character; and what is to become of the whole family, I cannot say."

"Poor Lucy!" exclaimed Ellinor, compassionately. "And has Mrs. Camlet dismissed her?"

"Yes, but in a delicate sort of way. She kept her on till all the busy work was over, and then told her she would not require her services any further for some time; but the fact is, Mrs. Camlet told me, in confidence, knowing I should not mention it to anyone, that she would not for the world employ Lucy Barr any more, unless some proof was found to take the stigma off her father's name. She is afraid she would lose her customers if she did such a thing. Indeed, I felt my flesh creep when I met Lucy yesterday on the road; and though she stopped and curtsied to me, I could hardly bring myself to say 'how do

you do ' to her. She looked like a ghost, too, poor thing."

"I must see her," said Ellinor, after a pause; "she may be starving for what we know."

"Take my advice, Ellinor, and do not countenance her any more. I don't say this from ill-nature or prejudice, or any unkind feeling whatever; but I do certainly think that, connected as you were with Allan Clarke, you should not be known to look favourably upon Abraham Barr, his greatest enemy at Norham."

"But poor Lucy was not an enemy of anybody," said Ellinor.

"That is nothing; she is Abraham Barr's daughter. Look at Mrs. Camlet there. She has not a word to say against the girl; she declares there never was such an honest, hard-working creature—late and early ready for anything—and never sleepy, like the other girls, when there was a particular reason to keep awake."

"So that, physically and morally, Lucy was a treasure, Mrs. Dart," observed Ellinor, who could not help feeling amused; "and Mrs. Camlet only grew virtuous and prudent

when the busy dress-making time was over. But, in spite of everybody, I cannot let the poor girl starve."

"But you see, my dear, that you are not a person of sufficient influence to do these sort of things. You are a young girl, too—that is, a *comparatively* young girl. In my day, one-and-twenty was thought rather an advanced age for an unmarried woman; but everything is changed now in that way, and you see women of five or six-and-twenty going on with airs just as if they were fifteen. At fifteen, girls are in the nursery now, and wear short petticoats, but they were considered grown up when I was young."

"So that I am not such a hopeless case as I would have been in former days," said Ellinor, smiling. "I trust that as the world advances women will be allowed more and more privileges in this respect, Mrs. Dart, and that in time we shall be supposed to be young as long as we are active and healthy, and have the use of our senses."

"Indeed, I don't know, my dear, but I wish you could get a husband, and not have people wondering and asking me why you don't marry."

"And, then, if I married, they would won-

der at something else—perhaps, why anybody married me, and so forth. Never believe, Mrs. Dart, that they would let you or me alone, no matter what we did or did not do; they would never stop wondering.”

“Oh, yes they would—the world is not so foolish as all that.”

“Well, we can’t stand all day in the cold here,” declared Mrs. Sharpoint, coughing impatiently; “I suppose there is no chance of our getting the large chair unless Mrs. Bouverie and Ellinor change their minds again to-morrow or next day.”

“Oh, we don’t do that,” replied Ellinor, who was too much buoyed up by her own thoughts to grow depressed under the smart, cutting speeches of her relatives; “but if you would really like the chair very much, I will ask mamma to let you have it. I am quite sure she would do so with pleasure.”

Mrs. Dart and Mrs. Sharpoint both exclaimed,

“Not at all—not at all!” several times, and brightened up into good humour, for they were not very implacable women, nor very wicked, in any respect; and they would not take the chair now, on any account, because it was offered to them.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A GREAT MANY QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS.

"You are going home now, I suppose?" said Mrs. Dart, as Ellinor made a movement to proceed on her way.

"Well, not exactly. I must, indeed, try and see Lucy Barr."

"You are such a very obstinate girl. And I have told you that it would seem so very strange in you to do anything for the Barrs ; leave them to some one else. I warn you that it is not seemly for a young, unmarried woman to take so much upon you ; nor would anyone expect it," said Mrs. Dart, as she walked beside Ellinor.

"But my being married or single has nothing to do with the probable starvation and misery of Lucy Barr, whom I know to be a good girl, and who has served me many times most faithfully," declared Miss Bouverie.

"But then, your own character, you know, might suffer ; and, in fact, let me tell you, though I should much rather not speak of such

a thing, that your sister has been talked of in a very shocking way about the——”

“Oh, Mrs. Dart, do not, I beg of you, tell me anything people say of Dora!” interrupted Ellinor, who turned deadly pale in a moment. “There are some things I cannot and will not listen to.”

“Then you have heard it all perhaps?”

“I heard nothing, and I will not hear it,” replied Ellinor, firmly, though she was trembling in every nerve.

“Do not be so excited, my dear; I meant no offence, I assure you,” returned Mrs. Dart, who peered into her young relative’s face with a strange look of curiosity and doubt, “only I think it is well to put you on your guard, and not to allow you to run into the danger of exposing yourself to public censure.”

Just then Mr. St. George came riding up the street, and pulled up his horse by a sort of instinct when he saw Miss Bouverie. He had been away from Norham for some weeks—almost ever since the disappearance of Mr. Clarke; but no doubt he had read and heard all about the mysterious business while he was absent. Ellinor could merely bow and say a word in answer to his greeting, as she felt so

confused by what Mrs. Dart had been saying to her, and then after a few remarks he rode away again.

"That is the young man whom people think Dora liked better than poor Clarke," observed Mrs. Dart, as Sir Ralph Barnard's aide-de-camp disappeared.

"She never let me into her secrets of that kind," replied Ellinor, who was still very pale, "I do not believe there was ever any serious attachment for each other on the part of either."

Mrs. Dart shook her head.

"You were very simple then, my dear, not to have discovered the real state of the case; for it is a fact that, not only did they write to each other before her marriage, but *after* it. There, now, do not look so angry; it is the truth, my dear. Her own servants who posted her letters have told it, and you know servants can find out and overhear a great deal when no one is thinking of what they are doing.

"But they do not always speak the truth, Mrs. Dart," said Ellinor, faintly.

"Ah! I generally find them pretty correct in what they say as to matters of this sort. You know they could have no reason for say-

ing anything against Dora, unless it was true. Altogether there is something extremely unpleasant about the whole affair, and sometimes I feel ashamed of knowing anything at all of the parties concerned. I really do. Dora will be badly off in a pecuniary point of view, I believe?"

"Her income will be very small, I think," said Ellinor.

"And how is it you are going to keep Evergreen when none of you have any money among you all?"

"I cannot explain that now, Mrs. Dart," said Ellinor, who was feeling less buoyant than she had done half an hour before, and was consequently a little inclined to lose her patience; but she controlled herself by a great effort.

"If I go over to tea in the evening, if it keeps up fine, I suppose I shall find you at home?" said Mrs. Dart, who in some way had an idea that Ellinor would not be at home.

"No, I am going away from home for some days," replied the latter.

"Away! and leaving your mother all alone?"

"Patty must keep her company while I am absent, unless Dora goes to Evergreen," returned Ellinor.

“What an odd thing to go away just now—so soon after your father’s death, too. Have you heard anything of poor Dawson lately?”

“Not a word.”

“Where in the world are you going to this evening, pray?”

“To Halesby.”

“Halesby! Humph. I thought you never went there now?”

“I have just returned from the Park this morning.”

Mrs. Dart opened her eyes, and Mrs. Sharpoint was roused from her silent severity.

“Upon my word, it seems everything is to be a mystery that you do! We ought to have a book written called the ‘Mysteries of Evergreen.’ What is the frolic of never letting your friends into your secrets? Here we are talking together for fully an hour, and yet it is only when we are about to part that you say you have just come from Lord Halesby’s?”

“Poor Lady Halesby is very ill,” said Ellinor, trying hard to be kind and forbearing towards her provoking relatives, “and that is the reason I am going to stay with her.”

"Did you offer to go?" demanded Mrs. Dart, with twinkling eyes, feeling that a good deal depended upon the answer she should receive.

"No; she requested me to go, and so I went and came back, and am going again, to remain at Halesby for a little time; and now, as I am in a hurry, you must let me away, Mrs. Dart. Good-bye."

"Good-bye, and don't let yourself be imposed upon or made too little of. You know my opinion about toadying, and the airs of great people, and you will very likely find out how correct they are before long."

"Poor Lady Halesby is too ill and weak to have many airs now, even if she had ever been inclined to have them," said Ellinor. "I think she would change places now with anyone, almost, who was in robust health."

"Oh! she was always full of affectation and a pretence of being ill these years," declared Mrs. Dart.

"It is no pretence now, Mrs. Dart, I can assure you of that," said Ellinor, hurrying past her friends, and endeavouring to get down the street.

But Mrs. Dart had to find out the exact state of Lady Halesby's health, and what her

ailments consisted of, and to say "Pooh!" to what she heard, and to express her belief that she could get up and walk about if she wished, and was very likely only staying in bed lest she might be expected to go and nurse her sick son. Having listened to all of which surmises in patience, Ellinor at length broke violently away, and went running on towards Church Street.

The Barrs still occupied their house in Church Street; for somehow the landlord had not made up his mind to turn them out of it. He was away from Norham, and that perhaps accounted for his leniency in the matter.

When Ellinor arrived at the upholsterer's dwelling she found only Lucy there, sitting by herself in the kitchen. A solitary house it seemed now, with no lodger in it; no bustling, anxious mother ruling over a large family; no happy work going on; no sound of hammer in the workshop; no sign of prosperous industry; no knocks coming to the door presaging orders for barrack furniture. Miss Bouverie thought it very sad, but she thought Lucy Barr's face the saddest part of it all.

"I am so glad you have come, miss," said

the girl, rising as Ellinor entered, "for I was just in sore need of some one to speak to. I don't know well what we are to do here at all, for the world seems turned against us altogether, and father is like a crazy man; he will neither sleep, nor eat, nor settle to anything, and he tells me such dreadful things, miss, that would frighten you, of what he has heard the people about are saying of him. Indeed, Miss Bouverie, I am afraid he will lose his senses altogether."

"And your mother, Lucy? Where is she?"

"Oh! miss, I don't know. None of us know," exclaimed the girl, bursting into tears. "She and Linny are both gone somewhere, and we're all so unhappy."

"But had your father and mother any quarrel?" demanded Ellinor.

"No, miss; they had no dispute at all that ever I heard of; but my father says he knows why she has gone away, and I heard him say to-day that he would go and speak to you about something particular."

"To me, Lucy?"

"Yes, miss."

"And where is your father now?"

"I don't know, miss."

"Then if he has anything particular to

tell me, he must write to me, Lucy, for I am going at once to Halesby, and will not be back for a long time, perhaps."

"Shall I tell him to write, miss?" asked Lucy, as she fixed her eyes with a strange earnestness upon the young lady's face.

"Yes, certainly, if he really wishes to acquaint me with anything."

"And, miss, you won't be offended or angry with anything he might say? You won't be angry with *me*? For, indeed, father isn't just right in his mind, I think, these few days past, and he might happen to say or do odd things, miss."

"Well, I will not be angry with you, at all events, Lucy," said Ellinor, smiling, and trying to look pleasantly; and as I may be wanting a little work done soon again, I shall advance you some money, as you must be very badly off.

"What kindness, Miss Bouverie!" exclaimed Lucy, bursting into a fresh flood of tears.

Ellinor was glad and thankful that she had the means of dispensing comfort in any way to the distressed; and she thought much of Lady Halesby's kindness, as she took the money which she handed to Lucy from her purse.

Her own mind was perplexed by troubled thoughts all the time she was trying to speak words of hope and consolation to her poor needlewoman. Mrs. Dart's hints and observations about Dora filled her with that vague dread and horror which sometimes forced themselves into her heart—vague they were, because she would never permit them to become distinct. She experienced a sort of nameless feeling that seemed to tell her that Dora might yet in some way set up another barrier against her happiness, that through her all her hopes might once again be banished; yet, let God's will be done: she was ready to submit to all chastening. She had outgrown the spirit of rebellion that had risen within her some months ago in the first great despair and agony of her soul; she found that it was vain to try to struggle against the power and the rule of Providence. Let her chafe, and doubt, and murmur ever so, the dispensations and ordering of the Almighty could not be changed, nor could any human reason pierce the mysterious ends intended to be worked out by such dispensation.

Many grave thoughts had filled Ellinor Bouverie's mind while she had watched in the dead of long nights beside her father's sick

bed, or sat alone in some room of the lonely house while its other inmates were sleeping. At such times it had seemed to her as though her senses were sharpened in a spiritual way, and that she saw clearer into the things that appertain to a future life. She was not superstitious in the least, yet it did seem to her that in the presence of the departing spirit peculiar influences dwelt around. Who has not felt in the same way in the awful moments when a human soul is lingering on the brink of two worlds—the temporal and the eternal; scarcely belonging to earth, yet not finally gone from earth's confines; standing at the portal of a new home—a home, perhaps, little dreamed of a few short weeks before — with angels hovering near, and the door soon to be opened and closed for ever?

Going out into the world's busy round again, people soon forget what they have felt and experienced in the solemn chambers of dying friends—they forget it all till another stroke falls in some unexpected quarter, and again a dear relative comes to lie where the other lay so short a time before, telling once more the unvarying story of our mortal nature.

As yet Ellinor had not forgotten the lessons she had learned in her father's death chamber, nor the solemn truths that seemed to grow so vivid in the presence of the dying.

Bidding Lucy Barr adieu, she hurried to Evergreen, where the Halesby carriage was in waiting for her ; and just as she was seated in it ready to set off, the postman arrived with a letter, bearing an address written in Mr. Trydell's hand. It was to herself, and she wondered what it could contain—wondering and looking at the outside of it, as people so often do when they receive unexpected letters, instead of opening them at once and reading them, to put an end to doubts and surmises.

“It is probably about some parish business,” she said to herself, and she made up her mind that she would not open it till she was on the way to Halesby, though, as soon as she was far out of the town, she began to fear she had done wrong in not reading the letter, which might contain some important communication concerning business at Norham.

Since morning she had grown so nervous, owing to Mrs. Dart's conversation, that she felt almost afraid to learn any fresh tidings from any quarter.

CHAPTER XXV.

MR. TRYDELL'S LETTER.

BEFORE reaching Halesby, Ellinor thought it better not to delay reading the letter any longer, and therefore she opened it at last, and found the following:—

“MY DEAR MISS BOUVERIE,

“As I know you are much interested in the family of Abraham Barr, I venture to write to you about them upon a very important matter. It seems that the upholsterer is strongly suspected of being in some way connected with the mysterious death of Mr. Clarke; and, in reviewing all the circumstances of the case, one cannot help coming to the conclusion that appearances at least are against him. It is a very awful suspicion to be attached to any individual, and in particular to a man of Barr's supposed respectability hitherto, and his general character. Of course great crimes are unfortu-

nately often committed by people in a far higher position of life than poor Barr's; yet still, it is always surprising and startling to find a man who has always maintained a reputation for integrity and good principle accused of being guilty of any barbarity. If Abraham Barr murdered Mr. Clarke (excuse my writing in such plain terms upon so fearful a subject), he must be a monstrous ruffian; and, if he did not murder him, then he must be a pitiably wronged man, whom it should be our aim to clear from the imputation of such a crime. I have written to a friend at Norham to ascertain if it is really the case that such a terrible suspicion rested upon the upholsterer, and I find that it is; that he is shunned more and more every day; and that people will scarcely speak to him, though openly nothing can be done against him; so that openly he has no means of uttering anything in his own defence. For the sake of his family, as well as himself, something ought to be done to clear his character, if possible, from such a stigma. It seems that his daughter Lucy is also beginning to suffer through the suspicions attached to him, and that she is quite thrown

out of employment. One can hardly wonder at people feeling much horror of a crime of such enormity as they suppose Barr to have committed; but it is hard for a man to be suspected if he is indeed innocent. I have made the acquaintance of James Hammersly, a farmer, residing about twelve miles from Compton Beckworth, at a place called the Priory Farm, of whom you have heard through his niece, Rachel Hammersly, who speaks much of your great kindness to her; and I have also found out Rachel's brother, Thomas Hammersly, who, after much labour on my part, has at length been partly restored to the favour of his uncle, and is now residing at the Priory Farm. But I fear he will not remain long there, as it seems, through a romantic chain of circumstances, that this young man, who was quartered as a corporal in the 17th Lancers at Norham for many months, is attached to Lucy Barr, and as his uncle has heard of the reports against Abraham's character, he refuses to countenance any further correspondence with the girl, and threatens to turn his nephew from the house if he continues to entertain an idea of marrying her. The Priory Farm will eventually become the property of young

Hammersly, in case of his uncle's death occurring before his own, as the usual course of nature leads us to believe it may, and, therefore, Lucy Barr's prospects would be very fair if she became the wife of the old farmer's nephew. It is not by any means surprising, however, that the uncle objects to such a connection for himself and his young relative. It is his firm conviction that the upholsterer will yet be hanged, as a conclusion of the terrible mystery that we all have so much reason to deplore; and, therefore, taking everything into consideration, it seems to be my especial duty to try and prove Abraham Barr to be an innocent man, if possible. During the long time that I was the upholsterer's lodger, I must say that I experienced great kindness and attention, more certainly on the part of his wife and daughter than upon his own; but his interests are their interests, and in benefiting him we must feel that we are benefiting them, even if we set aside the principle of justice. My object in writing to you, therefore, is this—that you might possibly hear from your sister something relative to Barr's last meetings or correspondence with Mr. Clarke—something, in short, that might tend to throw light upon

the matter. I should like to know her opinion upon the likelihood of the upholsterer's being concerned in the mysterious death of her husband; yet it is a subject that I should by no means venture to touch upon to her myself, though a sister might do so, perhaps, and especially such a sister as you are.

"I have thus presumed to write to you, because you kindly expressed a hope that we might be friends, though we could not be anything more to each other; and, therefore, I do not dread incurring your displeasure by venturing to send you this letter, knowing, as I do, how much interested you have always been in the Barrs. I must not forget to mention that the upholsterer's household has been rendered latterly more and more miserable by the flight of Mrs. Barr, who has gone, with her youngest child, Linny, to some place unknown—all on account of her conviction that Abraham is a murderer; so you see what desolation has been spread by these terrible suspicions. Is it any wonder that I am anxious to clear up the mystery?

"Believe me,

"Yours most truly,

"GEORGE TRYDELL."

The rector of Compton Beckworth would never have written that letter to Miss Bouverie, or ventured to correspond any more with her, had she not answered his proposal of marriage as she had done; and also, perhaps, had not Rachel Hammersly, who knew the Halesby gossip, given him to understand why it might have been that she did not accept that proposal. A man's vanity or self-love is never so deeply wounded by a refusal of his offer of marriage, when the lady in question pleads a prior attachment as a reason for not accepting it. He feels that he has been too late in the field, and however sad he may be, he does not experience the same mortification that he should if he thought that the woman he loved would not marry him upon any account, even though her affections were not pre-engaged.

Ellinor turned pale when she read Mr. Trydell's letter. What could she do for the Barrs? What could Dora say that would help to exculpate the upholsterer.

She did not answer the letter all that day, nor the next. Lady Halesby continued, as before, weak and prostrated, but perfectly conscious of what was going on around her, as clear in intellect as ever, and full of

anxiety respecting her son's state of health. How long the time seemed passing as she waited tremblingly for the first tidings from her husband ! Yet telegrams came every day from the physician who attended Gerard Lyon, and the words, " He lives," which commenced each message, gave a thrill of joy to many hearts.

Then, at length, came the news that he was better—though the life still flickered, brightening and fading, in an uncertain way ; and then there was a letter from Lord Halesby, with information that the great danger was past, and that there were hopes of amendment. Feverishly the mother waited each day for these messages, so feverishly and anxiously that Ellinor forgot her own feelings in thinking of hers.

" It is to me as if he were raised from the dead," said Lady Halesby. " I never can forget this time as long as I live. Precious as my son was to me before, he will be ten times more precious to me now, if he is spared through this illness."

And, saying this, the mother pressed Ellinor Bouverie's hand most fervently, intending that she would never more oppose Gerard's wishes in any matter, least of all in

his choice of a wife. But there was a haunting fear in Ellinor's mind that something might yet come to make it impossible for her to accept the hand of Lady Halesby's son, even if it were offered to her.

The day wore on, and at last a letter from Abraham Barr reached Miss Bouverie. She read it nervously, having first looked at the signature to see from whom it came. The contents were as follows:—

“MISS BOUVERIE—

“As it comes to pass that I am aware of certain suspicions and evil reports that affect my good name in the town and neighbourhood of Norham, where I had always wished to maintain a respectable character, I am compelled to write these few lines to you, trusting you will kindly pardon the liberty I take; but I think that in some way you or Mrs. Clarke might do something for me, as I will explain truthfully all that I know of the late barrack-master's death. I should be sorry to give pain to you or any of your family, owing to your great kindness to my daughter Lucy, and I therefore trust that anything I may say will not offend you in the slightest degree with respect to the late Mr. Clarke. I

can solemnly affirm that I had no act or part in his decease. He was my bitter enemy, and as far as the law would permit, I would have done what I could to justify myself against him, but, beyond that, I certainly should never have entertained a thought of evil towards him. Many a time I prophesied a bad end for him, for he was wicked beyond comparison, which I hope you will excuse me for saying to you, Miss Bouverie, though it is the truth, and these prophetic speeches are now turned against me. In short, my dear lady, I am given to understand that people suspect me of having imbrued my hands in blood—of having murdered a fellow-creature, and that creature the late barrack-master! Of course, I know that what I may say in my own defence will avail little, as it is a general rule with criminals to deny their guilt, otherwise there need be no police or lawyers to hunt out crimes and those who commit them; but still I will venture to exculpate myself in your eyes at least, though I do not believe that you would accuse me of guilt so black as murder, and perhaps you might be kind and condescending enough to speak in my defence to others.

“With respect to the last I know of Mr. Clarke I will now explain. While sitting in my house one autumn evening—the very evening of the disappearance of the barrack-master—a messenger came to me from Mrs. Clarke, desiring me to go up at once to her house, and I accordingly obeyed the request—greatly surprised, I must say, in my own mind, that she should have sent for me. Now, with all due respect to you, my lady, it is my duty here to remark that I always considered your sister was no fitting match for a man like Mr. Clarke, and that it was a great pity to give her to such a husband. I felt convinced that she could not really care for him, and therefore, though he was my greatest enemy, I never blamed *her* for anything that occurred on his side. She was *your* sister, too, which was enough to make me like and respect her. So, on going up to her house that evening as ordered, and thinking she might have something particular to say that would make peace between her husband and me, I found her in her drawing-room, where she requested me to go to her, in a very wild, excited state, more like a person demented (with great respect, ma’am),

than a sane one. Her eyes looked bigger than ever I saw them, and her face was as white as that of a dead corpse. 'Barr,' she said, when I entered the apartment, 'I wished to see you very much, and to say that I will assist you in any way I can, as I believe you to be a sadly wronged man.' She then forthwith spoke of my injuries, and asked me to tell her everything I knew of Mr. Clarke. I was extremely astonished; yet I pitied her, for I knew well how it was, and that she must have had some great quarrel with her husband, something quite out of the common, for she was to all appearance nearly crazed. I determined in my own mind that I never would let any mortal know what she said to me that evening, considering that I remembered her only a few short years before, a little child scarcely older than my own Lucy, running in and out of my workshop, and looking at me putting chairs or sofas together; so I tried to bring her to reason, and I said that whatever Mr. Clarke did against me could not be avoided but that I was sure he truly loved herself, and was anxious to make her happy. I affirmed this, though indeed I cannot say I thought it, for I don't believe the same

man had a heart to care for any mortal. However, all I could say had no soothing effect upon the poor young lady, and it seemed to me a most dreadful thing that she should speak in such a manner to a person of my grade. I took the liberty of advising her to send for you, ma'am; but she declared that she would not do that. She said she had no friend in the whole world that she could open her mind to, and that she wished the Almighty would take her out of this life altogether, which sentiments terrified me to the utmost. I stayed for a long time with her, trying to soften her distress, but without the slightest success. She made many promises that she would get me reinstated in the favour of the public, and spoke in a way that led me to fear she might be a little crazed. One expression of hers particularly struck me. She said, 'Barr, my husband may have wronged you, but he has wronged myself more than anyone in the whole world, no matter what injuries he has done in his life!' At last I had to leave her; but I was very uneasy, indeed, and I kept walking up and down in the vicinity of the house for a long time, dreading

I knew not what. It was a wild night, though not dark, and the river made great roaring as it rushed onwards. I walked on its banks in a perplexed state of mind, thinking of my own troubles as well as of poor Mrs. Clarke's—all arising from the same source—and the time flew faster than I had an idea of. The moon now and then came out from behind the masses of clouds that often obscured it, and I watched the river rolling on by its light, when at length I suddenly beheld a dark body floating past me on the waters. At first I thought it might be a log of wood, or a piece of a broken boat, but upon its coming nearer I saw that it was the body of a man, with the face upturned to the sky, and the moonlight shining just then full upon it. I was startled and dismayed. I thought I was deranged, and under the spell of a delusion. I looked and looked at it, and still it did not change or vanish, but it glided down the river close to where I stood, and I beheld the features of Mr. Clarke. I thought at first that maybe it was only owing to his being so much in my mind just then that I fancied I saw him; but it was too plain a sight for a delusion—there could be no doubt upon the subject. The barrack-master

—my enemy, and the husband of your sister—was floating, and apparently quite dead, upon the waters of the river Dingwell. I made a rush forward, as it were by instinct, and nearly fell over the banks myself, dropping the stick which I held in my hand. I was agitated and alarmed. How did Mr. Clarke come there? It was only a few hours since I had seen his wife enraged against him, and I was full of awe. Heaven knows what thoughts came into my head of the wildest kind. I thought of that young creature who had been, so to speak, sacrificed. I heard her words ringing in my ears—the strangest, most despairing words. And so I said to myself that I should not mention what I had heard or seen that night; I resolved to keep silence, but my blood was frozen, and I felt like one who was secretly engaged in some desperate crime. I never went home all night; I never gave the alarm of having seen a dead human body floating down the foaming river. I wandered about in a distracted state, and then, in the grey of the morning, I went to my house. But I could not rest or sleep; I did not lie down or try to close my eyes. Without knowing why, I was filled with apprehension. I couldn't tell even to myself what it was that

I dreaded, though I was overpowered with terror. This is the solemn truth, dear lady; and, if your sister could be persuaded to speak sincerely and confidentially to you, she would tell you that what I say is correct respecting my interview with her. It is my belief, from what she said herself that night, that, if Mr. Clarke had lived longer, *she would never have remained another day under his roof.* This, my lady, is the end of my tale, and all I can say respecting the death of the barrack-master. As surely as my name is Abraham Barr, so surely am I an innocent man, suspected wrongfully by a slanderous and evil world. Even my wife, who belongs partly to the Society of Friends, and is, consequently, more shocked at the thought of murder, or even a slight retaliation for an injury, however great, than the generality of other folk, has fled from her home in abhorrence of me, considering me to have imbrued my hands in the blood of a fellow-creature; so that I stand forth a bereaved and desolate man this day, appealing to you as my sole friendly help in need.

“With all respect,

“Miss Bouverie,

“Your most obedient Servant,

“ABRAHAM BARR.”

Thus two letters, nearly upon the same subject, reached Ellinor Bouverie within a few days of each other. Had the same influences prompted both the writers of these letters to apply to her for assistance in the same cause? She did not doubt what the upholsterer told her of Dora's excited and miserable state upon the memorable evening he alluded to, because she herself had seen her in nearly the same condition very soon afterwards. What had been the cause of it all? What mystery was it that encompassed her unhappy sister? She determined that she should try to discover the truth; she would not shrink from this duty, notwithstanding Dora's unwillingness to be communicative to her of late. And she would be so happy now only for this great nightmare of anxiety! Gerard Lyon was recovering quickly, and quite out of danger; he had desired his father to say that he should soon write a letter in his own hand to his mother. Did it not seem as though there was always to be a drawback to her joy and hopefulness?

CHAPTER XXVI.

CONTAINING A REVELATION AND THE END.

TRYING to subdue all her own feelings, and to nerve herself to the utmost with all the courage she possessed, Ellinor boldly resolved to order a carriage and drive from Halesby to Norham, to seek out her sister, who was just preparing to vacate the barrack-master's quarters. Ellinor found her in the hall giving directions about the removal of luggage, and she entreated her to allow her to speak with her, as soon as the vehicle containing the trunks and boxes had moved upon its way.

Dora happened to be in rather better spirits than usual, and she led her sister into an almost empty room from which the furniture had been removed. As soon as they were both seated upon a window bench, there being no chairs in the apartment, Ellinor gently, but firmly, opened the subject which brought her there that day. She told her sister of the

two letters she had so lately received respecting the dreadful suspicions that rested upon Abraham Barr, which were tending to ruin him and his family. Gradually she informed Dora of what the upholsterer had written to her, touching that memorable interview he had with her upon the last evening of her husband's life, and Dora listened to her patiently.

"I never knew that Barr was suspected, that anyone was suspected of murdering my husband," she said, while her face became of a ghastly hue. "I allowed no one to talk to me upon the subject; I shut my ears and my eyes to everything concerning his death, as far as I could."

"And now you know the truth, my dear sister," said Ellinor, taking Dora's hand, affectionately. "You are aware that poor Barr, whom we have known since childhood, is nearly driven distracted by the thoughts of being considered a murderer."

Dora here got up, and walked to and fro in the empty room for some time, with clasped hands. At length she spoke:—

"Oh! Ellinor! if you only knew the half of what I had to suffer for many months, you

would feel for me ; you would excuse everything I may have done or omitted to do ; but, as Abraham Barr told you, I dreaded to open my heart to you ; I felt as if I had no friend to fly to on the whole earth !”

“ But do not think so any longer, my dearest sister,” said Ellinor, imploringly, as she walked towards Dora, and put her arm round her. “ Look upon me as one who has your best interests at heart. Confide in me, I beseech you, and it will take a load of care off your mind.”

Dora reflected in silence for a time, and then requested Ellinor to leave her for the present, saying that she would meet her at Evergreen in the course of two hours, and that perhaps she might then be able to talk to her.

All Ellinor’s entreaties and supplications that she would speak at the present time were of no avail, and she was obliged to leave her, trusting that Dora would, indeed, fulfil her promise, and follow her to their mother’s house.

The two hours seemed a long time passing to Miss Bouverie, but they glided by at last, and, true to her word, Dora did come

to Evergreen. The idea of Abraham Barr suffering from the injurious suspicions attached to him, had nerved the young widow for much that she should not otherwise have done. She could not permit the upholsterer and his family to suffer in the wrong, and so she had come to the resolution that she would reveal the whole truth to her sister. It was a very painful task that fell to the lot of both listener and speaker; and many times during her narration, Dora became deeply agitated. In the first place, she gave an account of the attachment that existed between Mr. St. George and herself, just as it had stood, and of the part she had acted all through—wavering and undecided for a long while, and then determining at last to give up everyone and everything in the world for this first and only love.

“I wrote him a letter, Ellinor, telling him this—telling him that my father and my whole family could no longer interfere with my feelings; that my mind was made up, and I should accept him for my husband; but though I begged for a speedy answer to that letter, I never got it. I waited and waited in agony of soul, mortified and wretched—

all in vain; no reply ever reached me. I was determined not to write to him again. Having no one to consult with or advise me, I entertained all sorts of miserable feelings, and I would have given worlds that I had never sent him that first letter. I resolved to let him see that he was nothing more to me after his supposed slight in not answering me, and in pique I married Allan Clarke, believing he was an honourable, respectable man, though I knew I did not love him. For months I tried to do my duty to the utmost towards him, and if he had continued to be as kind to me as he was at first after our marriage, we should never have quarrelled; but he grew jealous and suspicious of me. He discovered that Mr. St. George had loved me; indeed, I believe that he knew that before I married himself; but he grew to believe that I still regarded Mr. St. George with feelings that I ought not to cherish then. Latterly I was most unhappy, though still wishing to do my duty; for with all his unkindness and extreme severity, I believed Mr. Clarke to be an upright person, and I did not relinquish my respect for him. But, oh! Ellinor what could I think when, one day,

while searching for a particular paper in his study, I found there, before my eyes, the letter I had written to Mr. St. George, and which I was so mortified at his never answering? It was unopened, it is true—sealed just as I had sealed it, but bearing no post marks on the envelope—bearing every evidence that it had never been in the post-office!

“ I thought I was not in my senses when I saw it. I took it up and opened it, and read it in the very wildest despair. I rushed to my husband when he returned home that evening, and accused him of the basest treachery and dishonour. I showed him the contents of the letter he had so basely intercepted; I pointed out to him what I had said in it, that nothing could induce me to accept himself as my husband, and that all the love I ever had, or could have, was given to the person to whom the letter was addressed. We had a dreadful scene of bitter anger and reproaches. I declared that I should never live another day under his roof. I cannot remember or know what else I said, for I was maddened beyond endurance; but I think he told me I should be sorry yet for all I said that evening, and that God knew

whatever he had done in his life that was wrong, he had loved me most faithfully. But I would listen to no soothing speeches; it was in vain for him to say he had never read that intercepted letter. He had prevented it going to the person for whom it was intended, and that was enough to ruin him for ever in my estimation. He left the house some time after our quarrel, not by the hall-door, but by the back way—passing, I should say, from the little gate in the rear of the house, which you know leads to a walk towards the river. I sent for Abraham Barr, being in such a state of excitement that I scarcely knew what I did, and all that he told you of our interview is correct. Next day, as you remember, I sent for Patty, to whom I had given that unfortunate letter to Mr. St. George to post, and I asked her how Mr. Clarke got it, and accused her of treachery. She told me Mr. Clarke had taken it from her, saying he should post it himself. I desired her not to tell you or anyone at home of this wretched business; but as my husband did not return home all that day I felt uneasy and alarmed, as he had thrown out hints during our quarrel that terrified me after my first great anger was

over. At length I found a note lying on the mantelpiece of the dining-room that filled me with horror. It was written to myself by him, just before he left the house, and contained the information that he should commit suicide, as it was impossible to live under the many misfortunes that overwhelmed him. He told me he was ruined in a pecuniary way by the late failure of speculations he had entered into, but that if he had thought I loved him, he would have tried to bear his losses. You know Ellinor, he was not a religious man at any time."

Ellinor clasped her hands in horror, and Dora spoke no more for some time.

"And why did you not tell this before?" asked Ellinor, sadly.

"Because I dreaded to do so at first, and afterwards I was still more averse to doing so. However, you remember I would not apply for the pension that would have been due to me now, if Mr. Clarke had not committed suicide. The wives of men who are guilty of such crimes are not entitled, I believe, to army pensions, and I could not be so dishonourable as to take money under false pretences. I am weary of my life, dear

Ellinor, and whatever you advise I shall do. I am no longer unwilling to let the world know the truth about my husband's death ; and since Abraham Barr is suspected, I think it ought to be done."

"We will write a paragraph to some influential paper, and state that it is now known beyond a doubt that the unfortunate barrack-master committed suicide," said Ellinor ; "and we can add that a letter stating his intentions was found."

"Do whatever you like, my sister," replied Dora ; "but do not speak any more to me just at present."

* * * * *

And now, kind readers, the mystery having been cleared up respecting the fate of the unfortunate barrack-master of Norham, little more remains to be told than what, perhaps, without much trouble, you can picture to yourselves ; though fain would I linger longer in your company—but that this tale having already run to the length of the usual three-volume novel, it behoves the writer to dwell but lightly on the events that occurred after the interview between Ellinor Bouverie and

her sister just narrated. Let it suffice for me to say that steps were taken to let the public become aware that Allan Clarke, the late barrack-master at Norham, had committed suicide, by drowning himself in the river Dingwell; and that Abraham Barr was at last restored to popular favour and confidence—his wife and Linny returning to him; while his daughter Lucy became the wife of Thomas Hammersly, whose uncle took both the young people into favourable notice.

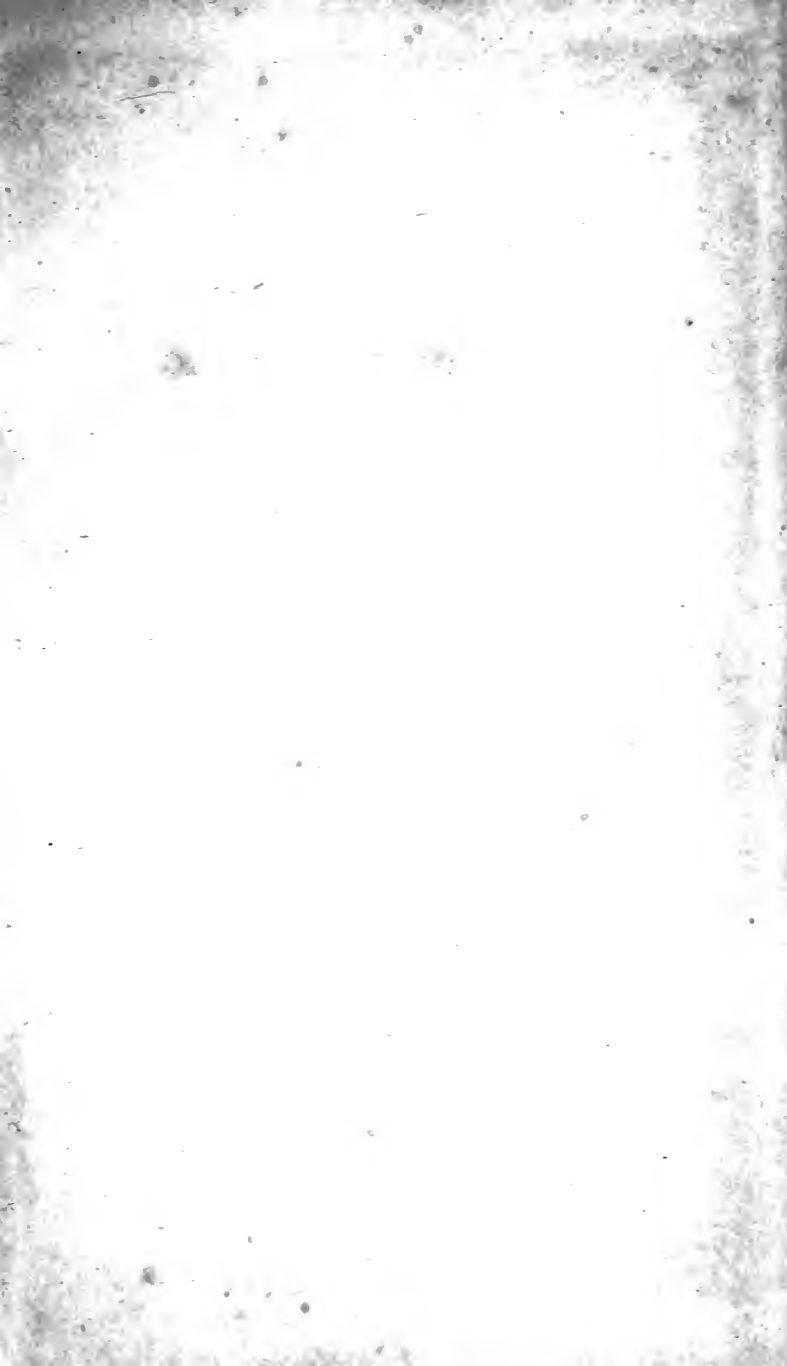
Gerard Lyon, having recovered his illness and returned home, received the consent of his parents, Lord and Lady Halesby, to his marriage with his cousin, Ellinor Bouverie, who promises to be a worthy successor to the "Good Lady of Halesby," whose picture she so much resembled.

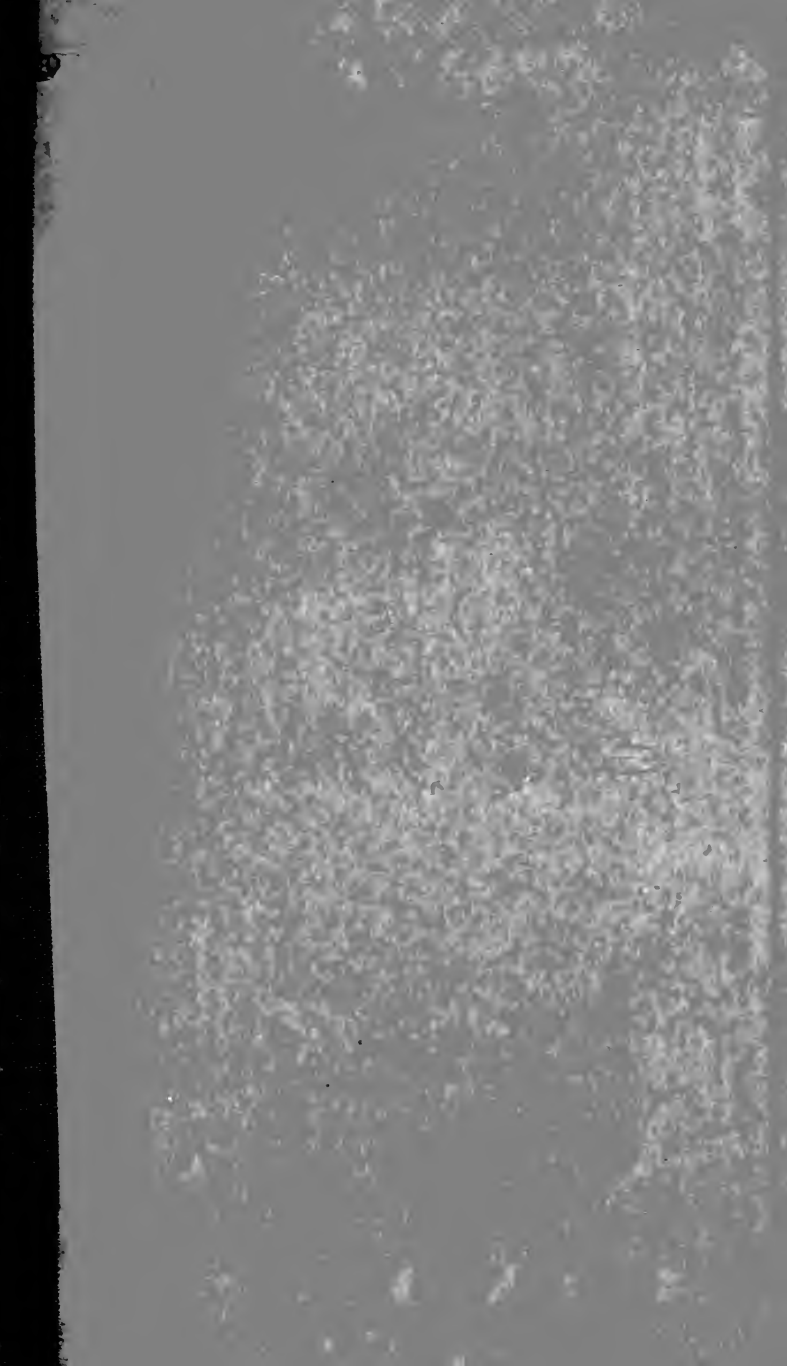
Mr. Trydell is not married, and the people to whose spiritual wants he ministers, no doubt wonder why the rector of Compton Beckworth does not take a wife. He is a grave, thoughtful, middle-aged man, who has written some clever works, the first of which was dedicated to the Hon. Mrs. Lyon; and he is sometimes staying on a visit at Halesby Park.

Dora Clarke kept on her mourning longer than the usual time for such youthful widows, but of late people think she may form a matrimonial alliance more suitable than the last one ; and rumours are afloat that Lord Killeevan—who some years ago was simply Mr. St. George, aide-de-camp to Sir Ralph Barnard, and who is often at Halesby—is anxious to persuade her to make her home in the wild regions of Donegal, in the land of Erin ; but how it may be is not yet known positively.

THE END.

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